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Madam C. J. Walker (1867-1919) African American Entrepreneur, Philanthropist, Social Change Activist, And Educator Of African American Women

Ruth Queen Smith
University of Tennessee - Knoxville

To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Ruth Queen Smith entitled "Madam C. J. Walker (1867-1919) African American Entrepreneur, Philanthropist, Social Change Activist, And Educator Of African American Women." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education, with a major in Education.

Ralph Brockett, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

John Peters, Mary Ziegler, Diana Moyer

Accepted for the Council:

Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

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MADAM C. J. WALKER (1867-1919)
AFRICAN AMERICAN ENTREPRENEUR, PHILANTHROPIST, SOCIAL CHANGE ACTIVIST, AND EDUCATOR OF AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Education
Degree
University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Ruth Queen Smith
August 2007

DEDICATION

In praise and thanksgiving to God
I dedicate this to

My loving family,

Ruth Williams and Yancy Smith, Sr.
My loving parents,

Nancy and Yancy Smith, Jr.
My dear sister and brother

My brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Especially, Father Eric Andrews, C.S.P.

And

My family at John XXIII Catholic Center and University Parish
At the University of Tennessee, Knoxville

And of course, Madam C.J. Walker and her associates
Whose struggle made a way out of no way

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During my academic career at the University of Tennessee, I was privileged to learn with some of the best facilitators of adult learning processes and techniques. These include Drs. Juliet Merrifield, John Gaventa, Howard Pollio, Ralph Brockett, John Peters, Mary Ziegler, Loita Velazquez. I give special thanks to Dr. Joan Paul who introduced me to interpretive biography and the power of its voice. Special thanks to Drs. Harry Jacobson and Tom George for their wisdom and support. I owe a great deal of thanks to Drs. John and Judith Neff for their generosity and long-term care of my general well being.

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thanks to the Catholic Diocese of Knoxville, especially St. Joseph the Worker, Immaculate Conception Church and the Women's Faith and Fellowship Group at All Saints Church for their words of encouragement.

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Wilma Gibbs, archivist at the Indiana Historical Society, and the entire staff of the society were so very helpful. They historical society gave me access to the invaluable documents and artifacts that allowed this story to become the work that it has become.

This work of love would not have been accomplished without the life of Madam Walker and her generation. The first generation that was born free of slavery was one of the most successful and determined generations of the modern era of African Americans.

Without her accomplishments and contributions, this work would not have become the seed that it is. As St. Paul graciously writes to one of his communities, one can do all things through him who gives us the strength. Therefore all the praise and glory go to God. I have learned that life is more fulfilling when we live in communities of care and concern for one another. It's not only the eco-systems that are dependent and connected one to another; we are also interconnected and dependent upon one and another. Thank you all.

Abstract

Madam C.J. Walker was born on December 23, 1867. She died May 25, 1919. For her first thirty-seven years, she worked as a field hand, a washerwoman, a domestic, and a cook. With no formal education, she created the Madam C.J. Walker Manufacturing Company, an international business that manufactured ethnic beauty and hair care products. She also started a network of beauty colleges that taught African American women the science, art and the marketing of cosmetology. In less than fifteen years, her hard work and her inspired work force of over twenty-thousand African American women made her one of the most noted self-made millionaires, black or white, of her time. Madam Walker helped many and inspired thousands with her philanthropy and generosity. Perhaps most notably, she was a financier and leader in the civil rights movement and publicly worked for political social change.

This study is interpretive biography that examines Madam Walker's accomplishments and contributions in the early twentieth century. Additionally, I present a model of adult education informed by Madam Walker's life story. Based on Madam Walker's ways of educating African American adult women, the Smith Model of Adult Education for Individual and Community Change is intended to expand the diversity of models available to adult educators for initiating and sustaining personal and community change. The model seeks to bring about social change through economic development. This social change begins with and is grounded within adult education practices. Adults desire and learn for personal improvement and change. Communities are impacted by small groups of adults who desire and need economic improvement. As individuals and

small groups of adults begin to transform communities through economic improvement, they identify philanthropic needs within their communities. The ultimate goal is social change through the power gained from adult education and economic development.

Adult educators, philanthropic organizations, and economic developers are challenged by this interpretive biography and the Smith Model to identify persons of interest whose lives have significant themes and threads of the future promise and potential of adult education based on Madam Walker's accomplishments, contributions and the Smith Model.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction to the Study

There was so much riding on the line. It was now or never. There was not much time left. The convention was in its last, dwindling hours. This was not any gathering: it was the Thirteenth Annual Convention of the National Negro Business League. In 1912, this illustrious body was the United States' foremost gathering of African American businessmen, and a few businesswomen.

During the convention, Madam C.J. Walker had listened to the success stories of numerous African American businessmen. However, after each black businessman had finished his presentation, Madam Walker may have thought to herself, "That does not hold a candle to my business, my accomplishments, and my contributions." Madam Walker did not think that these thoughts were arrogant or boastful: she knew that her reactions to the presentations and evaluations of the presenters were the truth.

Consequently, she had to do something. It was not as if she had not tried, but all of her efforts had been thwarted resoundingly by the prominent gatekeeper of the convention. Now, her best hope rested in the hands of her influential friend, George Knox, her contemporary from Indianapolis, who had agreed to intercede on her behalf. They knew that it was futile to directly ask the convention convener. He would never let her speak. Therefore, Knox thought that they could go around the gatekeeper. Reluctantly, she had agreed. However, she did not want Knox to be placed in a compromising or awkward position with the convention presider. Their plan was this: Knox would present his appeal to the distinguished participants of the convention

directly. They hoped that the presider would be coaxed, pushed or even shamed, into allowing her to speak. Deep in Knox's gut, he believed that the convention's participants would be receptive to her message. He believed that they would be very inspired by her words.

Madam Walker and Knox knew that this was a big risk. What if Knox's attempt to manipulate the convention participants into hearing her story backfired? If this happened, he ran the strong chance of alienating some very successful and very prominent African American businessmen. Knox had a lot to lose. He was a business owner and the black businessmen in the room could retaliate. Yet, Knox was willing to take a risk on her behalf.

Knox looked at Madam Walker, and she gave him a nod of approval and encouragement. It was her decision: she decided to press forward. Bravely, Knox rose to his feet, stood erect and looked distinguished. Nervously, he cleared his throat and began to speak softly. As he began to proclaim Madam Walker's accomplishments, his voice gathered strength. He mustered the power from within his heart and announced an entire litany of her praises. At the end of this litany, he respectfully requested that Madam Walker be inserted into the final hours of the convention's proceedings.

As Knox finished, you could hear a pin drop. He stood for about thirty seconds. Then, awkwardly, he sat down in his seat. Knox waited. Madam Walker waited. The convention delegates waited. Their silence indicated that they would not make a move unless it was sanctioned by the gatekeeper. Finally, the gatekeeper responded; he rolled his eyes and shook his head. He looked frustrated—even agitated. He seemed perturbed by the interruption and never so much as glanced in Knox's direction. It was as if Knox

were not even there. The presider of the convention picked up the meeting from its stopping point. Knox had appealed to the convention delegates; he looked down to the floor, embarrassed before his peers. Madam Walker was embarrassed for Knox, her friend. She was shocked, disappointed and hurt by the smug arrogance of the gatekeeper. But she was not surprised.

The convention presider, the gatekeeper, was Dr. Booker T. Washington. Washington was one of the most influential African Americans at the turn of the twentieth century. He delighted in his role as gatekeeper. The attention, prestige and power delighted Washington. Washington was the colored man that powerful white men sought out when they wanted a colored outlook on an issue. White businessmen and white politicians knighted Washington as the designated Negro spokesman. These molders and shakers of social policies such as the social interaction between the races, civil rights, education and the economy preferred to interact with Washington rather than any of the other African American leaders of his day, such as, W.E.B. DuBois. Consequently, Washington's fingerprint was on the social and political policies that affected the lives of all African Americans in the United States.

There was no doubt that Washington had power. More importantly, he enjoyed flexing his power among black people. This was one of the few characteristics that Madam Walker did not like about Washington. It was not Washington's refusal to grant Knox parliamentary recognition that bothered her. Rather, she was disturbed by Washington's coldness, his rudeness, his total disregard for Knox's feelings and his detachment from Knox. Washington's refusal to connect with her raised questions in Madam Walker's mind regarding his judgment and his leadership savvy. She was

disappointed in Washington. Madam Walker thought that a nationally renowned colored man of his stature should have been more mature, more sophisticated, more humble, more flexible and more sensitive to the feelings and accomplishments of his fellow African Americans.

While Madam Walker respected Washington, this did not mean that she was intimidated by his reputation or his heavy handedness. Even though Washington had power, he was still only a man and she refused to yield to him her power. She would not let Washington browbeat or shame her into changing her agenda for the convention. Who did Washington think that he was? She came to the conference to speak to the assembled body of black businessmen and women. She was determined to speak.

Actually, she was not very surprised at the interchange between Washington and Knox. Eighteen months earlier, she had experienced the first of two run-ins with Washington. In a letter dated December 2, 1911, she asked his permission to meet with those at his gathering:

> My dear Sir:
>
> I am desirous of attending the Farmers convention which will convene at your school Jan. 17th, 1912. I am writing to ask if you will allow me to introduce my work and give me the privilege of selling my goods on the grounds. Enclosed find my booklet which will give you an idea of the business in which I am engaged. (Harland 384)

Washington responded to her request with a condescending letter. In a paternalistic tone, he tartly informed her that she had misunderstood the nature of the meeting. In a letter dated December 6, 1911, he told her that it would not be to her

financial gain to come to the conference. Washington informed her of his reason for refusing her permission to speak to the participants and their wives: “The Tuskegee Negro Conference will be a meeting of poor farmers who come here for instruction and guidance, and who have little or no money (398).”

His response did not dampen Madam Walker’s desire to mingle with African Americans who were engaged in building better lives for themselves. While the Tuskegee gathering was composed primarily of male farmers, Madam Walker thought that this was an excellent opportunity to inspire their wives, daughters, sisters and friends to examine the possibilities of entering the business world. The idea that she had was that these women could also engage in business activities and economic development which would support and compliment the traditional farming base income. This new type of women’s work, selling hair and beauty preparations, was different from farming and domestic work, which were traditionally and socially the only choices available to Southern black women. Madam Walker’s idea would help African American women create their own financial worth, independence and domain. Washington did not grasp her powerful and innovative concept. At this time, Madam Walker did not know if Washington was resistant to her gaining access to his groups of influential African Americans because there was resentment to black women sporting straightened hair or if he simply did not want to share his groups with another colored person, who was also a woman. Whatever the reason, Madam Walker was determined not to allow what she perceived as his bias against black women in the business of straightening hair to obstruct her efforts to gain access to African American business people.

Madam Walker was persistent. One month later, she wrote Washington again. It is not clear what conference she was seeking to attend. This inquiry may have been her request to speak at the National Negro Business League's convention of August 1912. Whatever meeting that was occurring did not matter to Madam Walker; she pressed forward. This time, Madam Walker tried a different approach. On January 17, 1912, she wrote Washington the following letter:

> I am writing you this note to ask if you will be kind enough to introduce me to the Conference. I do not want to explain my work, but I do want them to know that I am in the business world, not for myself alone, but to do all I can for the uplift of my people. (456)

Neither Madam Walker's nor Washington's archives indicate a response from Washington to Madam Walker regarding this letter of request. Incredibly, Washington's refusal to include her in the conference in Alabama and his refusal to allow her to speak at his meeting did not color the way in which Madam Walker felt about Washington. However, at this time, she had a job to accomplish. Madam Walker had to confront Washington face to face. Paramount in her mind was the probability that she could completely alienate a man whom Madam Walker deeply admired and respected. However, she was convinced that she had a message that the delegates needed to hear. Madam Walker had not attained her status in life without taking many risks. To her, risk-taking was the creative axis of a world spinning with opportunities and possibilities. Taking risks taught her about her strengths, weaknesses, creativity and the providential care of God. Challenging the unknown taught her how to survive, thrive and land on her feet. Yet there was the strong possibility that Washington would embarrass her as he had

embarrassed Knox in front of his peers and his friends. The likelihood of this happening did not concern her. She did not really care for some of the elite business people in the audience, especially those from Chicago.

Life had prepared Madam Walker well for nearly any type of challenge; she was tough. At the hands of life, she had learned how to survive and how to thrive. Quickly, Madam Walker sized up the situation. One, she had a captive and influential audience of African Americans who were from various localities across the country. Two, she realized that she might never again have a chance to address this elite group of entrepreneurs. Three, Madam Walker could simply keep quiet and let Washington win. Letting Washington win was not an option; it troubled her more than the possibility of alienating Washington or the probability of being embarrassed by him. Therefore, Madam Walker concluded that this was an opportunity she had to use to her advantage. Madam Walker made her decision. This time, she would not be held at bay or kept outside by the gatekeeper. It was no longer a matter of "if" her voice would be heard; it was only a matter of time until Madam Walker would raise her voice and make her presence felt.

The Woman Speaks

Washington had the floor. He was discussing the role that African American banks needed to play in the economic development of African American communities. Slowly and gracefully, Madam Walker rose to her feet. Once she stood erect, she closed her eyes, gathered her thoughts and uttered a silent prayer. A few of the delegates noticed her. Some of them raised their eyebrows while other delegates nudged one another with their elbows. Others nodded their heads toward her. Washington was not looking in her

direction. However, he sensed that he was no longer the focal point of the delegates' attention. He turned to see what was distracting the delegates from his presentation. He saw her. Did he recognize Madam Walker? He wondered what she was about to do. Unlike Knox, Madam Walker did not ask Washington's permission to speak. Nor did she ask for a spot after the unfinished business of the convention had been completed. Madam Walker cleared her throat and raised her voice. She interrupted Dr. Washington! She took the floor of the convention with these words:

> Surely, you are not going to shut the door in my face. I feel that I am in a business that is a credit to the womanhood of our race. I am a woman who started a business seven years ago with only $1.50. I went into a business that is despised, that is criticized and talked about by everybody—the business of growing hair. They did not believe such a thing could be done, but I have proven beyond the question of a doubt that I do grow hair! (Laughter and applause.) The first year that I was in business I took in $1,366; the second year, I took in $3,652; the third year, I took in $6,662; the fourth year, I took in $10,989; the sixth year $13,586; and this year (up to the 19th day of the month—last Monday), I had a grand total of $63,049, all told, made in my hair business in the city of Indianapolis. (Applause.) (Davis 154)

Now, she had their attention. Washington and most of the convention delegates were stunned. Instead of perspiration dripping down the sides of their faces, they looked as if buckets of disbelief had been doused across their faces. They were astonished. Washington was agitated by the interruption. However, the force of Madam Walker's

words and the grit of her spirit had silenced him. He was speechless and muted—attributes very atypical of his personality and public image. Madam Walker's words had mesmerized him and the convention participants. Yet, Washington did not make any gesture that indicated that he would grant her parliamentary recognition.

In the meantime, the convention participants may have wondered with amazement: "Who was this black woman? Who was this five-foot, four-inch-tall, brown-skinned woman with a broad nose?" (*Madam Walker Archival Collection* Walker Passport Application Box 1 [Not in Folder]). What African American woman had the boldness of mind, the strength of spirit, and the guts to interrupt Dr. Booker T. Washington, the premier African American leader of her generation?" Washington was renowned as an educator of adults. He was a proponent of industrial education for African Americans and was the driving force behind Tuskegee Normal School. He had grown the normal school into Tuskegee Institute, an institution of higher education for African Americans. Washington was also a very prominent political figure who was instrumental in the construction of African American life and society. It was Washington who was behind the scenes and who had supported the separate but equal social policy of the *Plessy v Ferguson* ruling in 1896. However, Washington was the founder of the National Negro Business League. It was Washington who had convened the delegates to Chicago, Illinois. This was *his* convention!

Madam Walker's face and her mannerisms gave no clues of her background. She had a tragic childhood and her early adult years had also been filled with sadness and difficulties. You could not tell this by her appearance now. Today, she looked like she was on easy street. Madam Walker's attire was stately: she looked very elegant. Even

though the convention room was hot, steamy, and sticky, she appeared cool, calm and undaunted by the heat. She was perfectly pressed, crisp and fresh. Her stylish, floor-length dress was finely tailored and obviously very expensive. Her demeanor stated that she was a woman of wealth and class. She projected an ambience of class and an aura of sophistication. Instantly, some of the participants knew that she was a woman who had a powerful spirit. She was in complete control of herself. Now, she was in control of the convention.

Madam Walker had not enjoyed wealth and affluence in her early life. However, she did not try to run away from her past. She respected, and in a sense, honored her life experiences, including the experiences that were filled with pain and disillusionment. There were no "good-old days" stories from Madam Walker's childhood and her young adulthood. Because her journey and her story were so incredible, she felt that she needed to give the delegates a small glimpse into her remarkable struggle from rags to riches: "I am not ashamed of my past; I am not ashamed of my humble beginning. Don't think because you have to go down in the wash-tub that you are any less a lady!" (Prolonged applause.) (Davis 154-5)

This was a washerwoman! How could a washerwoman accomplish the feats that this woman claimed? Was she an actor who was staging a performance for the convention participants? Was this woman a mentally deranged person or a "want-to-be" who was simply talking wildly to gain the attention of the members of this distinguished audience? Would any of these elite African American business people take the word of a former washtub operator, elbows high in soapsuds and white, pasty starch? Could anyone take this woman's incredible remarks seriously? Was it believable, or even conceivable,

that an African American woman (or man, for that matter), could make $63,049 in the first six months of 1912?

A few of the convention participants began to whisper among themselves. Was this the woman that they had read about recently in African American newspapers? Several such newspapers had published articles about an amazing woman who had made unprecedented advances in the world of business. These stories read like tales of a mythological, legendary and matriarchal figure. Everything she touched had turned into pure, twenty-four carat gold. Her Midas touch came from her creative vision and her very strong work ethic. Paradoxically, many African Americans who had read about her doubted if she really existed. Some African Americans, including some of the delegates, thought that the stories had been crafted by African American newspaper editors who wanted to inspire African Americans to work harder to make their mark in the business world. Stories about this woman and other successful African Americans were the "stuff" that sold newspapers. Perhaps these stories were true. It dawned on some of the delegates that the woman they had read about was neither a myth nor a legendary figure. This spirited and remarkable woman stood alive in their midst.

Madam Walker was intrepid. She spoke with authority, confidence and power. Her regal presence portrayed the ambience of an African queen mother. Her success was proof of her ingenuity. Madam Walker had earned the right to be boastful. She was the stellar example of the new twentieth-century African American woman. This new drum major for African American women led and represented the masses of African American women whose power and potential had not been articulated or affirmed during the three days of the Annual Convention of the National Negro Business League. Ironically, the

woman whom Washington attempted to marginalize, silence and exclude from the convention was the perfect model of the businessperson, male or female, that he desperately sought to elevate before the delegates. Madam Walker manifested the spirit of resilience, creativity, determination and achievement that the National Negro Business League sought to promote, inspire, affirm and nurture within African American communities. Undaunted, Madam Walker continued to stand and tell her story:

> I have been trying to get before you business people and tell you what I am doing. I am a woman who came from the cotton fields of the South; I was promoted from there to the washtub (laughter); then I was promoted to the cook-kitchen, and from there I promoted myself into the business of manufacturing hair goods and preparations. Everybody told me I was making a mistake by going into this business, but I know how to grow hair as well as I know how to grow cotton, and I will state in addition that during the last seven years I have bought a piece of property valued at Ten Thousand ($10,000) Dollars [sic]. (Prolonged applause.) (154)

Madam Walker raised her hands and patted them downward in the air as she tried to hush the delegates. She raised her voice in order to be heard above the murmurs of the disbelievers and the applause of her newly found contemporaries as well as the sounds of nervous laughter of those who did not know what to make of the woman's proclamations.

This woman spoke of the "concrete" building blocks of economic development. Her building blocks to success included the ownership of land, the construction of a factory and the creation of job opportunities for African Americans. The jobs that she

created through her business paid African American workers fair and just wages. She went on to say:

> I have built my own factory on my own ground, 38 x 208 feet; I employ in that factory seven people, including a bookkeeper, a stenographer, a cook, and a house girl. (Prolonged applause mingled with laughter.) I own my own automobile and runabout. (Prolonged applause.) (154)

Her expression revealed that she was disturbed by the convention delegates, for they seemed to be more impressed with her accumulation of material goods, such as her automobile and her runabout, than with the meaning and purpose of her testimony. Madam Walker was concerned that the delegates thought she was as shallow as they appeared to be. A close inspection of her attire, especially her jeweled accessories, indicated that she indulged in the affluence and material pleasures that accompanied her success and wealth. Notwithstanding, Madam Walker had a more serious and urgent message to share with her contemporaries. She was attempting to speak to the hearts of the convention delegates with the hope that they would carry her message to the millions of faceless and oppressed African Americans with whom these influential business people interacted:

> Please don't applaud—just let me talk! (Laughter.) ... Now my object in life is not simply to make money for myself or to spend it on myself dressing or running around in an automobile, but I love to use a part of what I make in trying to help others. Perhaps many of you have heard of the real ambition of my life, the all-absorbing idea which I hope to accomplish, and when you have heard what it is, I hope you will catch the

> inspiration, grasp the opportunity to do something [of] far-reaching importance, and lend me your support. My ambition is to build an industrial school in Africa, by the help of God and the cooperation of my people in this country. I am going to build a Tuskegee Institute in Africa! (Prolonged applause.) (154-55)

Finally, Madam Walker had accomplished her mission. She had stood before this prestigious audience of leading African American business people and she had stated that it was unacceptable and immoral for successful African Americans to accumulate wealth simply to mirror the perceptions, values and lifestyles of wealthy white Americans. This daughter of slaves, orphan, sharecropper, domestic, cook, widow, single parent, washerwoman and now wealthy businessperson believed that the measure of an African American was determined by how much he or she worked towards the economic betterment of African American communities. Essentially, she believed that the real value, asset and success of an African American businessperson was not in how much money that he or she generated for himself or herself. Success and admiration should only be lavished upon African American businesspersons who used their resources for individual and community transformation.

Madam Walker believed that African American business people had an economic, moral and spiritual responsibility to their communities and their race. This businesswoman believed that personal transformation occurred when adults, who had been denied access to quality educational experiences as youths and as adults, took advantage of adult learning opportunities that were designed to enhance personal economic improvement. Likewise, her educational training programs were also for adults

who had benefited from good educational opportunities and these adults simply wanted better economic opportunities than what a segregated society had to offer. What the women did not know, at first, was that participation in Madam Walker's vocational training and continued professional development would draw the participant into social change activities that were designed to improve life within their communities, thus fostering community transformation. In turn, this approach to life, learning and work productivity would lead to the communal transformation of African American communities across the country. African American business people needed to initiate and support adult learning programs that promoted the transformation of African Americans and their communities.

Ultimately, Madam Walker believed that the natural and immediate results from personal transformation could initiate the transformation of society. Subsequently, she believed that transforming African American society through adult learning and training programs for economic development would initiate the transformation of the racist, white, supremacist society that dominated and oppressed African Americans and persons of African descent across the world. Years before, Marcus Garvey challenged African Americans to think globally with his Pan African Movement; Madam Walker realized that there was a connection between persons of African descent who lived in the United States and the continent of Africa. She believed that successful African Americans should help the African homeland with any resources that they could share. She also wanted African Americans to become models for persons of African descent in the Caribbean, in South America and in Africa.

A reverent silence fell upon the delegates and embraced the room, as if the delegates were waiting for Madam Walker to say more. Suddenly, there was an eruption of thunderous applause. One by one, the delegates rose to their feet, their applause mounting to a standing ovation, a sign of respect for her and an approval of her words. Madam Walker bowed to her audience, her gesture of appreciation of them and of her respect for them. When the delegates sat down, the reverent silence returned.

Knox rose again. His words shattered the silence. He confirmed that all of her claims were true. In fact, he added that she had omitted many laudable actions, such as her contribution of $1,000 to the capital building fund of the local Colored Young Men's Christian Association. The convention delegates enthusiastically applauded again.

Now, there were two people standing: Madam Walker and Booker T. Washington. Even though she was across the room from Washington, Madam Walker looked him square in the eye. Washington blinked. His gaze changed from that of an amazed spectator to the stare and glare of an upstaged politician. The eyes of all delegates were fixed on the dynamic woman and upon Washington. Washington collected his thoughts and took one step backwards. Quickly, he regained his controlling posture. He cleared his throat several times but made no comment. He did not give her a smile of approval, nor did he nod his head as a symbolic gesture of tipping his hat in recognition of her business accomplishments. He cleared his throat again. He spoke, "The next banker to address us is Mr. W. W. Handout, of the Prudential Savings Bank of Birmingham, Alabama" (Davis 155). Then he picked up his remarks concerning the necessity of African American banks in the success of African American business development. Washington, who believed that the economic development of the African

American community was essential, had been rudely interrupted by Madam Walker at just this spot in his program. He ignored her in a fashion similar to his ignoring Knox's request for her to speak to the convention, much to the shock of the delegates. Astonished and perplexed by his deliberate slight, Madam Walker looked at her friend Knox and slowly sat down. However, this time, she felt victorious because she had finally told her story. Her voice was heard. A photograph of Madam C.J. Walker is located in the Appendix (Figure 1.1).

CHAPTER 2

Madam C.J. Walker: An Interpretive Biography

The charismatic woman, who commandeered the attention of the most prestigious gathering of leading African American business people in 1912, was Madam C.J. Walker. In the latter years of her lifetime, she was known as one of the most remarkable women, black or white, who lived during the early twentieth century. She attained her success and unparalleled contributions by promoting the uplift of African Americans through the development of a more market savvy and work-place literate population of African American women. By preparing African American women for new types of jobs and new ways to earn a living with better economic opportunities, black women gained access to enhanced economic opportunities that Madam Walker was instrumental in developing and sustaining. In addition to her vested interest in developing an array of successful cosmetologists, vocational teachers and continuing educators, and sellers of hair and beauty care products, Madam Walker was a leader of the modern civil rights movement of the early twentieth century and she accentuated her political involvement with an equally strong philanthropic commitment to social change.

The accomplishments and contributions of Madam Walker to her race and society are numerous. However, it is interesting to note that Madam Walker also made significant contributions to the future practice of educating adults, even though the formal study of adult education did not exist at the time in which she lived. Because of her extensive archival depository, it is possible to study her life and examine her accomplishments and contributions from an adult education perspective.

The Purpose of the Study

This study examines the accomplishments and contributions of Madam Walker to the field and practice of adult education. Additionally, the study presents the Smith Model of Adult Education for Individual and Community Transformation, a model grounded in Madam Walker's innovative practice of adult learning, job training, economic development, philanthropy and social change. In the early twentieth century, Madam Walker was among the earliest, and possibly the most successful, educators and job skills training providers of adult females, black or white, for positions and jobs that had the potential to lead a woman to economic independence and self-sustainability. Because her training colleges helped thousands of African American women find a practical, dignified, needed profession by which to improve themselves, their families and their communities, Madam Walker's business and social strategies and practices count as one of, if not the most successful adult training and education processes for African American women during the first half of the twentieth century.

At the time of her death, in 1919, Madam Walker's system of professional and vocational training had contributed to the economic empowerment of over twenty-thousand African American women (Box 1). Manufacturers of beauty and hair care products and nail and foot care practitioners speak to the endurance of her leadership and creativity in the arenas of economics, politics and social agencies. Her work is evident today within the African American business community and within circles of philanthropists. However, what is not a part of Madam Walker's legacy is that she is not recognized, studied, appreciated or used as the basis for a model of adult education.

Research Questions

The following questions guided this study:

(1) What accomplishments and contributions of Madam C.J. Walker enhance our understanding of how adults learn?

(2) What is the relationship between social context and adult education for the economic empowerment of African American women during the early twentieth century?

(3) How has Madam Walker's early twentieth-century practice of educating adults contributed to the development of a model of adult education for contemporary times?

Significance of the Study

Madam Walker's story is not unique. Many African American women have lived lives of merit and worth, yet few have had their lives examined by adult educators. In the past two decades, some of the most outstanding African American women have been recognized, studied and appreciated for their accomplishments and contributions to the field of adult education. Yet one of the most successful African American educators of adult women in the twentieth century, Sarah Breedlove McWilliams Walker, better known as Madam C.J. Walker, has not been studied nor recognized for her accomplishments and contributions.

Her adult learning and training system, the vehicle for change, had its humble beginnings in her hair care and beauty supply company. This cottage industry grew into an entrepreneurial business that eventually generated hundreds of thousands of dollars a year. Madam Walker created a sole proprietary college with branches across the United

States, within the West Indies and in parts of South America. Through these schools, she was able to develop a highly educated and trained body of African American women who recruited new agents and sold her goods and products to hundreds of thousands of buyers. She built a hair-care manufacturing empire that provided substantial incomes for over twenty thousand African American women. An African American woman who worked as a Madam Walker agent or hair stylist earned substantially more money than she could normally earn within the segregated society of the early 1900s. Through Madam Walker's vocational adult education program, these women were empowered with the skills, abilities, desire and the motivation to significantly change their lives and their communities.

The social change that occurred was not only economical in its impact but also political. Through their adult education experiences and their association with the Madam C.J. Walker Manufacturing Company, African American women were commissioned by Madam Walker to transform themselves, their family units and their neighboring economic, social and political community. With Madam Walker's example, training and opportunities, individual African American women united the work of individuals within small communities into a nationwide force of African American women. Women whose life-transforming education began with Madam Walker's colleges changed the social, economic and political context for thousands of African American people. What began as one poor woman's creative attempts to earn a better living grew into a business empire that promoted adult vocational training for the economic development and the political and social empowerment of African American women. The remnants of which remain in the African American community today.

The significance and magnitude of Madam Walker's accomplishments, contributions and practice of helping adults to learn to change their lives, both personally and communally, loom greatly on the future horizon of the practice and field of adult education. This study is significant because it examines one of the earliest and most archival substantiated processes of adult education for individual and community transformation for African American women.

Madam Walker's early history is also significant because of the incredible obstacles she transcended. Born the child of former slaves, she was herself an illiterate sharecropper for the first ten years of her life. As she told the convention delegates, she was promoted from the cotton fields to the washtub, then on to the cook-kitchen. She did not learn to read and write well until her own daughter, who attended normal school and college, helped her to master those subjects. Because she hated poverty and had developed an ingenious hair care product that she sold to other poor women, Madam Walker, at 37, started up her beauty product business. After she started her business, she hired a personal tutor to help her continue her educational pursuits. She epitomized the goals of all fine schools and the educators of adults: to have their students become life-long learners. At the time of her death, she was widely known as the nation's first, self-made, female millionaire. Her death was mourned by black and white Americans because she was widely known for her work ethic, innovations and generous philanthropic nature. Madam Walker credited her success to God and to her constant pursuit of learning in adulthood. Her experience of transforming her own life by attaining an education as an adult and of helping supply better educational opportunities to thousands of others support the transformational nature of adult education.

This study contributes to the rich historical legacy of African Americans, especially African American women in the field of adult education. The study also contributes to the diversity of models of practice in the field of adult education: the model developed by the writer, the Smith Model of Adult Education for Individual and Community Transformation, has been a discernment discovered through researching educational models and through close observation of various studied models.

The Smith Model, based in large part on the adult learning processes and the business practices of Madam Walker's life work, has the potential and power to influence the contemporary practice of adult education. The Smith Model has similar potential to help persons enhance their economic well-being and transform their communities. Thus, Madam Walker's practice of learning for personal and social change emerges from a unique historical context to become reinvigorated and to give hope and promise to persons living within another particular historical context with different personal and community social and contextual challenges. Consequently, Madam Walker's approaches and creative strategies for individual and community transformation retain value and worth for future generations. Through the Smith Model, Madam Walker's accomplishments and contributions have the potential and the ability to impact people, times and places that Madam Walker never dreamed of affecting. Nearly one-hundred years ago, Madam Walker sought to change the lives of African American women and their families. Today, through the Smith Model, she retains the power to influence and inspire, change and transform large numbers of African Americans and whites, Hispanics, Asians and other minorities. This model can potentially influence the practice of adult educators, those who seek to empower poor persons and transform the

communities in which they live. Consequently, the Smith Model and this interpretative biography and dissertation have the potential to re-energize and re-direct the lives of thousands of poor and disenfranchised persons who struggle for justice and equity within the United States.

Contributions to the Field of Study

Using a historical methodology, this study examines Madam Walker's work to determine the efficacy of her educational practice and suggest that her work reflected adult education principles and methods. Ultimately, the study will discuss that Madam Walker's work, which was designed to help African American women transform their personal lives, their families' lives and their communities, was, in effect, pioneering adult education practice. Thus, through the perspectives of an interpretive biography and dissertation, which includes a model for contemporary social change, it seeks to contribute to both the historical body of adult education literature and the contemporary body of adult education literature that addresses social change.

The study seeks to contribute to the growing body of African American historical research in the field of adult education. There is much interest in the work of educational innovators such as W.E.B. DuBois, Nannie Burroughs, Booker T. Washington and Mary McLeod Bethune. However, little serious research has been undertaken or written regarding a woman who actually stands as an educational giant in the annals of African American and United States innovations and success in adult education. Perhaps, because Madam Walker had such success on the business side of her life, little has been known or at least emphasized about her innovations and contributions to the practice of adult learning for economic empowerment and social transformation. She established a hands-

on laboratory as the foundation for her network of colleges. Later, she developed an innovative continued professional development program of Traveling Agents who were trained to foster the latest marketing and scientific knowledge in the field of beauty and hair care. Madam Walker's leadership traits are highlighted by her ability to network and organize a national hair and beauty care union of African American manufacturers. Madam Walker believed that wealth was a gift from God that should be used for the benefit of the less fortunate, and this strongly held spiritual belief became the foundation for her many philanthropic activities. Extensive philanthropic efforts gained her notoriety and fame that was so impressive that whites were forced to take note of her in a positive way in which they had not attended to African Americans before her time. Equally as impressive was her risk-taking to become involved in the early civil rights movement of the twentieth century. Madam Walker thrust herself into the red-hot leadership of the anti-lynching and constitutional rights movements for African Americans. Even though her business manager warned her about possible repercussions from whites and the government, she stayed the course and persisted in being very visible in the movement for civil rights.

Moreover, this study demonstrates not only Madam Walker's contributions and accomplishments to the field of adult education, but it also vividly illustrates the desire, presence and power of adult learning among African Americans during the early part of the twentieth century. Madam Walker's accomplishments and contributions are indeed monuments to the transformational power and the presence of adult education themes within the African American community.

Even though many African American women have lived lives of meaning and worth, their wisdom, ingenuity and outstanding accomplishments are not well known. One reason for their invisibility in the field of adult education may be unintentional:

> "If you want the history of a white man, you go to the library. If you want the history of black women, you go to the attics, the closets, and the basements," states Darlene Clark Hine, noted African American historian and scholar, as she has experienced the norm for African American women's archival sources for research. (Hine 1)

Finding the needed documented records of the significant contributions and outstanding accomplishments of African American women is generally a quest as elusive as discovering a Pharaoh's queen-mother's tomb. African American women adult educators, not often considered noteworthy, have often had their life's work shifted, shuffled and sifted from closet to attic, and often, unfortunately, their precious historical jewels were simply lost or discarded.

Exploring Madam Walker's Rich Archives

Fortunately, Madam Walker does not fall into this regrettable category. Madam Walker left a rich depository of primary source data that tell her story, literally in her own voice. Her archival records more than adequately divulge her accomplishments and contributions to the field of adult education. The handwritten letters, record books, newspaper articles and photographs provide the data to reconstruct the story of her contributions and accomplishments to the field of adult education. Her extensive archives also serve as the rich and inspirational grounds for the Smith Model.

This interpretive biography is grounded in the extensive and rich depository of primary source materials contained in the Madam C.J. Walker and the Madam C.J. Walker Manufacturing Company (1867 -1919) Archives deposited in the Indiana Historical Society Library in Indianapolis, Indiana. I spent one month in that library—one month of eight-hour days reading, researching, interpreting and decoding the Madam Walker Historical Collection in its archival entirety in the reading room.

The *Madam Walker Archival Collection* consists of one hundred and twenty-six manuscripts and one hundred and nine over-sized boxes of archival materials. The boxes contain personal and business correspondence from agents, officers, and managers of the Madam C.J. Walker Manufacturing Company. The majority of primary source data used for this study was contained in these boxes. This collection contains no archival documents from Madam Walker's early life. Madam Walker's archival collection journeys her professional adult life. This includes handwritten letters from Madam Walker; some of these letters were written on the front and back of brown paper bags. Many of the handwritten letters were scratched on scrap pieces of paper from boarding room hotels. Most were written in pencil. The reports and correspondence reflect the grammar, spelling, and writing style of a barely functionally literate African American woman from the early twentieth century. Some of the words, while properly spelled in the early nineteen hundreds, are not accepted as Standard English spelling today. Consequently, I have inserted today's spelling or words that add clarity to the text. These additions to the data appear within brackets. Letters from Madam Walker in her later years were typed by her personal secretary and signed by Madam Walker. Some of these typed letters have additional handwritten notes from Madam Walker. The tone and flavor

of these typed letters are consistent with the earlier handwritten letters; which probably indicates that the letters were dictated by Madam Walker and that they contain her original thoughts. Even though some of these letters are over seventy years old, faded, sensitive to light and touch and extremely fragile, they are still very readable.

The collection's rich repository of correspondence from politicians, leaders of social-change organizations and representatives of social agencies that solicited Madam Walker's personal, political and financial support are also included in the many boxes of data. Business correspondence from companies that interacted with Madam Walker's Manufacturing Company paints a picture of the economic climate of her times. Madam Walker's agents contributed a substantial number of letters to the collection. Also included are many unsolicited testimonials from ordinary women, customers and or cosmetologists, who were pleased with their hair or with their newfound business riches.

The social context of the study and its relationship to adult education as an empowerment tool for African American women unfolded on the dramatic correspondence between Madam Walker and Freeman Briley Ransom, who was not only her business manager, but also her legal advisor, confidant and sounding board. Professionally meticulous, the conscientious, detail-driven Ransom kept copies of Madam Walker's diverse correspondences. Ransom's records keeping may account for the rich in-depth primary sources of research on Madam Walker's life and times. Ransom kept copies of all business correspondence, created by using the latest office "technology" of the early twentieth century—a typewriter and a "high-tech" piece of carbon tissue paper behind typing paper for making copies. In many instances, a carbon paper copy is the only remaining record of Madam Walker's strategies and practices of

adult learning methods, vocational educational principles, philanthropic preferences, political savvy and involvement in her world. Madam Walker's professional career unfolds in the correspondence collected from among Madam Walker, her agents, customers, professionals, business people, educators, politicians, social agency representatives, adversaries and the ordinary people who admired her.

John H. Stanfield states, "When a personal collection has abundant correspondence files, including both incoming and outgoing correspondence, it is probably a rich source for reconstructing social networks and their evolution and functions over time" (Stanfield 273). Stanfield also says that the diversity of communications is very important in reconstructing and interpreting the life, accomplishments and contributions of a historical figure. The archival collection in the Indianapolis collection records a rich diversity of persons who interacted with Madam Walker. Stanfield elaborates in his examination of race and ethnicity in research methods that if an archival collection possesses only outgoing correspondence, then it is not an adequate source for understanding and explaining the intricate personal and social systems of the person or agency being studied. Thanks to Ransom's meticulous record keeping, perhaps due to a sense of the historical importance of his employer, a collection exists that is amazing in scope, historical value and sheer volume. This collection is accessible to all historical researchers, including those in the fields of African American studies, women's studies, as well as the fields of business and adult education.
The depth and richness of the Madam Walker archival collection and the extensive amount of social contextual sources such as African American newspapers, white newspapers that covered her life and the writings of her contemporaries greatly

influenced the choice of methodology. I chose to present Madam Walker through the lens of an interpretive biography. By employing this method, I also intentionally decided to minimize the influence, selection and prioritizing, and emphasis of the biographical works of A'Lelia Perry Bundles, the great-great-granddaughter of Madam Walker. I recognized that the archival strength was such that only time-line information was necessary to faithfully tell Madam Walker's story from an adult education perspective. Therefore, when I deliberately chose to turn a blind eye to utilizing the family perspective, I believe that I gained a stronger adult education voice. The study's method was dictated and compelled by the archives rather than the archives being a function of any particular method. Consequently, I believe that for the purpose of adult educators, philanthropic organizations, economic developers and persons interested in social change, Madam Walker's voice and my voice are strong. This will be discussed more in the methods section which follows shortly.

In addition to the archival materials previously discussed, a sizable collection of a variety of archival boxes in the Indianapolis archives contains a further collection of business, professional and personal artifacts. These artifacts include receipt books, cash statements, photographs, certificates, stock holdings, membership certificates, advertising campaigns, awards and other artifacts. This vast collection of researchable documents and artifacts span the business life of Madam Walker and continue for several decades following her death. These precious documents have been preserved in a remarkably good condition.

The Madam Walker Archival Collection also contains another rich source of primary data: an extensive collection of newspaper articles devoted to Madam Walker.

African American newspapers were infatuated with Madam Walker. Many clippings and long articles from various African American newspapers reported on Madam Walker's social life, business accomplishments, philanthropic activities, social activism and political activities, thus providing a remarkable social context in which scholars may place Madam Walker for the purpose of historical educational study. These African American newspapers include the Freeman and The Recorder of Indianapolis, Indiana; The New York Age of New York City; and the Washington Bee of Washington, D.C. Madam Walker was such a noteworthy phenomenon that many white newspapers reported her accomplishments and social activities as well. These newspapers included the New York Times, New York City; the Indianapolis World, and the Indianapolis Star, Indianapolis, Indiana. The archives' collection of newspaper clippings and articles provides a vast source to scholars seeking data for studies of Madam Walker and her social and educational impact.

The published and unpublished written works of Bundles were additional primary sources used for this study. Bundles has access to additional primary sources that have not been deposited in the Madam Walker Archival Collection in Indianapolis. Her exclusive family data are revealed in her two books, *Madam C.J. Walker, Entrepreneur*; and *On Her Own Ground: the Life and Times of Madam C.J. Walker*.

Secondary sources examined for this study include additional accounts about Madam Walker, including: Black Women in United States History; Black Women in America; An Historical Encyclopedia; Dictionary of American Biography; Dictionary of Negro Biography (1982); Notable Black American Women (1992); A Biographical History of Blacks in America Since 1528 (1971); and The African American Almanac. In

addition, several magazine articles written about Madam Walker in popular magazines were also examined for this study.

Wilma Gibbs, Program Archivist for the Indiana Historical Society, was the principal archivist for the *Madam Walker Archival Collection*. Gibbs wrote the inventory guide that outlines the collection and issued a warning regarding some commonly referenced secondary source materials about Madam Walker:

> Source material on this subject should be handled with great care. Even standard sources such as the *Dictionary of American Biography* contain basic errors, in fact, and these mistakes are often repeated from source to source…Therefore, a special effort has been made to check all statements, where possible, with documents in the collection. (Gibbs 20)

The Madam Walker Archival Collection provides deep insight into the professional and private adult life of Madam Walker. All of the primary source documents that the Indiana Historical Society provides to the public were thoroughly examined for this study. Newspaper accounts of Madam Walker's business life were also studied. Primary source newspapers that were thought to have reported about Madam Walker or her contemporaries were also investigated. Even articles that had no specific information concerning Madam Walker were examined for the purpose of gaining insight into the social context of this study. Examining the non-Madam Walker-specific articles helped me gain a broader sense and a deeper appreciation of the power and influence of the social context described in those articles as they affected and shaped Madam Walker's life.

Perspectives, Biases and Points of View

Historical research is not simply a compilation of a calendar of events that occur over a specific period of time. Research of the past involves the selection, interpretation and analysis of data concerning a person or group of people, or an event or set of events. Writing history is an intentional act. Historical researchers must mine, sift and excavate through specific philosophical, political and social perspectives. As neutral as most writers of history may desire to be, the very choice of a person or an event reflects a political, social, religious or non-religious persuasion, gender preference, economic paradigm, racial attitude and political agenda.

In the chapter, "Historical Social Science: Methodologies, Methods and Meanings," in the *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, edited by Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, Gaye Tuchman states: "Any social phenomenon must be understood in its historical context. To grasp historical information one must have a point of view, including an interpretive framework that includes some notion of the 'meaning' of history" (Tuchman 306).

I made a strict attempt to remain unbiased as data were collected, examined and analyzed. However, I acknowledge that my respect for Madam Walker increased as I investigated more and more about the nature of the social context. I found myself supporting Madam Walker as I continued to investigate her work and life. Like Madam Walker, my family is from the South. My parents and grandparents and their siblings lived during the same social context. The childhood family stories that I had been told confirmed and reflected the social context that I found within the primary source materials. In many ways Madam Walker's story became a triumphant representation of

my family's experience and that of most Southern African Americans, who come from generations of life in the South. The childhood stories of poverty, limited economic options, night-riders, lynching of family members, migration to the Mid-West, the thirst for education, the desperate social conditions, the plague of alcohol and more were, in effect, triangulation for the study. From an adult and educational perspective, I embraced her non-violent approach to civil rights and social change as I had also embraced this during the sixties and seventies. Her quiet position on women's rights resonated with my belief about the power and potential of women. For a short period of time, I owned a business and associated with the movers and shakers of Middle Tennessee. My academic and adult education experiences were supportive of ways to foster and encourage adult transformation. I worked at Highlander Education and Research Center and other educational and social agencies that sought to bring about social change through adult education.

With all of this disclosed, I believe that these factors make for a rich study of a woman whose voice has not been heard. The admission of my embrace of Madam Walker's political-economic and social perspectives does not distort or skew the study. Madam Walker as a fact-find list would remain one of the most outstanding persons of the early twentieth century. Madam Walker, in her own voice, bridges a void of history and challenges adult educators today to look for and listen to more African Americans, minorities and women.

Prior to this study, my knowledge of Madam Walker was based upon only a few pieces of information. Growing up, I had heard about Madam Walker being the first self-made female millionaire; I knew of her innovations, especially the straightening comb.

However, I had no knowledge of her impact on economic development, social agencies, colleges and political activism. I had no knowledge of the social context and the barriers that faced African Americans during her lifetime. In his book, *Race and Ethnicity in Research Methods*, Stanfield wrote that ethnographic methods and ways of looking at contexts are excellent approaches to the study of historical persons who have been ignored or marginalized, "Ethnography is applicable to reconstructing institutions and communities through the researcher's taking on the role of an anthropologist, observing some faraway village" (Stanfield 279). This study combines a qualitative, ethnographic historical research approach and methodology along with traditional historical research methods. Thick and rich descriptions bring the archival collection to life; while the study attempts to expose the turbulent social context. Situated within this context, the voice of Madam Walker and those persons who were significant contributors to the importance of her life, echo across the page, bridging a valley of time that is nearly one-hundred years later.

Madam Walker's voice is heard as the leading solo, but she is not the only voice in the choir. She emerges into the spotlight only because of the cries of millions of oppressed blacks who share the turbulent social context known as life in the United States during the late eighteen hundreds and early nineteen hundreds. In order to hear an authentic voice, if it is at all possible to hear the voice of persons who lived decades earlier, I became embedded within rich accounts of a life that was considered typical and believable for the time period. The study is saturated with the fundamental qualitative research tool or technique of rich descriptive writing. I used sections of descriptive narrative and quoted dialogue between the significant persons in the study. Using their

own correspondence and records, I “allowed” Madam Walker and Ransom, her business manager, to tell their story with as little interruption from me as possible.

While this method of presenting historical adult education research may seem somewhat unorthodox, it is justified by experts in the field, such as Denzin who says that historical research is concerned with the meaning of documented turning points in the life of a person. According to Denzin, historical research examines the life documents of a person and uncovers how the person gave subjectivity and meaning to his or her life experiences. Historical research creates narrative accounts and literary inscriptions of the lived experiences and stories of others. He writes:

> This method would rely upon the subjective verbal and written expressions of meaning given by the individuals being studied, these expressions being windows into the inner life of a person…there is no clear window into the life of a person, for any window is always filtered through the glaze of language, signs and the process of signification. And language, in both its written and spoken forms, is always inherently unstable, in flux and made up of the traces of other signs and symbolic statements. Hence there can never be a clear, unambiguous statement of anything, including an intention or meaning. (14)

Ultimately, it is the passage of time, which cannot be measured or interpreted to any real satisfaction that makes historical research subjective, deductive and an art form that contains a science. The researcher reconstructs and tells the story, so that history is constructed by the writer of history as much as it is by the person who is the focus of the researcher. The writer of history becomes as influential and as powerful as the one being

studied. Race, gender, class, academic persuasion, age and the time period in which I live are all filters, points of view and perspectives from which I had to make sense of the documentation. Historical research is a human science that has subtle and not so subtle realities that color the research. My filters or influences are, in reality, biases. This truth is as important as the disclosure of sources and discussion of methods. As the researcher, I must disclose my filters, perspectives, biases and any incentives, financial or otherwise, that contributed to or influenced this study.

I am a middle-aged, African American woman, who grew up in a two-parent home in the South during the modern Civil Rights Era, the Vietnam War and the Feminist Movement. During the time when students questioned and protested a variety of political and social issues, I attended and graduated from Syracuse University, with a double major in photojournalism and political science. I worked as the first female television news photographer in the South; this gave me access to a world that African Americans and women had not been privileged to see from the inside. This included Ku Klux Klan rallies and the capture of James Earl Ray, the convicted assassin of Martin Luther King, Jr. After a career in television news, I started a small business; this was followed by times during which I was the assistant director of the Small Business Development Center, housed at a local university in Middle Tennessee. This was followed by work as a community organizer in the field of health care with poor populations. Additionally, I was active in politics and non-profit organizations that worked for social change through economic and political action. My academic education continued when I began a master's degree in adult education, which has led to participation in the doctoral studies program in adult education. The overwhelming bulk of my research on the doctoral level

is qualitatively based; this includes qualitative, case study, oral and narrative studies, participatory, phonologic and ethnographic research methods. Highlander Education and Research Center greatly influences my theoretical perspectives. I have worked with grass roots organizations using feminist and Afro-centric ways of approaching community economic development and political social change. My work and ways of thinking are also greatly influenced by my deep religious convictions. I help adults learn how to embrace and make meaning and sense of sacred texts. In this process of helping persons to "see" themselves in ancient writings and bridge them to situations and circumstances of the present time, the early roots for the Smith Model began to take shape. Making sense, making meaning and using the past, a time in which one did not exist, has value and positive implications for contemporary times.

In the article, "Recent Methodological Developments in the History of American Education," Carl F. Kaestle makes statements concerning the role and relationship of the researcher in educational research. Kaestle states that historical research is both a science and an art form. He says that arguments and conclusions made by historical researchers are drawn from historical, methodological procedures and common processes agreed upon by historians. Kaestle writes:

> The process of making such historical generalizations is not merely inductive; one cannot simply add up all the little facts and make them into statements about larger structures and processes. Generalization remains an act of creative interpretation, involving the historian's values, interests and training. Although the evidence establishes some limits, writing history remains subjective to a considerable degree. (61)

Kaestle's article appears in the book, *Complementary Methods for Research in Education*, edited by Richard M. Jaeger. According to Kaestle, educational history faces similar challenges, as does the field of history: These methodological problems, however, should not deter or cast a cloud of authenticity and value upon historical research; but it must be seen within the larger context of that which includes the body of evidence and the world of the researcher:

> There is no single, definable method of inquiry and important historical generations are rarely beyond dispute. Rather they are the result of an interaction between fragmentary evidence and the values and experiences of the historian. History is a challenging and creative interaction, part science, part art. (61)

The researcher filters the person of inquiry "elixir" or extract to distill the essence of his or her life into a concentrated pronouncement of the person's experiences and understandings. In addition, these experiences, understandings and pronouncements are framed through a perspective known as a theoretical methodology. The person or persons of interest do not choose the methodology through which they are studied, examined or presented; the researcher does. The power of historical research comes from this methodology because it becomes the "ultimate" filter, frame, paradigm or perspective and way of viewing the person's life experiences.

The theoretical method for this study is the following: Afro-centric and feminist. Afro-centric means that, to the best as possible, the story is told from a voice of African American thinkers, writers and persons of the times. Issues of race, class, economics, law, social norms and historical events are told from the African American experience

and perspective. The feminist theoretical perspective is intertwined with the Afro-centric perspective. It sheds light upon the previously mentioned areas of interest and incorporates within it the poignant, African American, women's perspective of struggling against the male dominated thrust of race leadership and an oppressive racist culture.

Filters and theoretical perspectives in historical research lead the researcher down a path that becomes more distinct when the researcher has holes or voids within the story that must be told. History is story, and story is constructed and interpretive in its nature. This raises the question: what does a researcher do when there are voids or very little documentation that surrounds the documented life of the person being studied? In other words, are events and story that are not documented in the lives of persons who do not have the rich resources of data back-loading open to the researcher to construct plausible story? Is this truth and, more importantly, is this history? Are truth and history minimized or compromised when social-contextual details are constructed?

The Nature of Constructed Realities

Denzin believes that the presence of biases, theoretical perspectives and a well-investigated social context of the time, actually facilitate the broadening and the needed deepening of history. For Denzin, archival materials and the researcher's biases contain meaning and insight into two worlds held in literary tension:

> The problem involves facts, facticities, and fiction. Fact refers to events that are believed to have occurred or will occur, i.e. the date today is July 27, 1988. Facticities describe how those facts were lived and experienced by interacting individuals (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 119; Husserl, 1913/1962, pp. 184 and 410). Fiction is a narrative (story, account) which

> deals with real or imagined facts and facticities. Truth, in the present context, refers to statements that are in agreement with facts and facticities as they are known and commonly understood "within a community of minds (Pierce, 1959, Volume 8, p. 18; 1958, p. 74). (Denzin 23)

Facts, facticities and fiction are the lived reality of everyone's life. In interpretive biography, the presentation of reality is crucial to understanding and making meaning of history. Again, according to Denzin:

> Reality consists of the "objects, qualities, or events to which true ideas are directed (Peirce, 1958, p. 74). There are then true and false fictions; that is fictions that are in accord with facts and facticities as they are known or have been experienced and fictions that distort or misrepresent these understandings. A truthful fiction (narrative) is faithful to the facticities and facts. It creates verisimilitude, or what are for the reader believable experiences. (23)

The methodology of this study rotates around the primary-source data with an African American-centered, feminist perspective. Shulamit Reinharz, author of *Feminist Methods in Social Research*, defined feminist historical research as the following, "Feminism brings scholars from one field to another and creates hybrids. It exposes the artificiality of disciplinary boundaries and the need for trans-disciplinary fields such as women's studies" (Reinharz 160).

Jill Matthews, quoted by Reinharz, challenges feminist practitioners of content analysis and historical research to a high theory of feminist historical research:

> Feminist history must not simply "add women and stir" or be what she calls "women and…" histories. Nor should we slap standard sociological concepts onto women's experiences in artifacts. Rather, feminist historians must "locate the independent patterns of women's historical experiences." (160-61)

Organization of the Study

The study is ordered in the following manner: Chapter 1 draws the reader into the accomplishments, contributions, political philosophy and the character of Madam Walker. Chapter 2 presents the purpose, significance and methods used as well as a discussion on filters and biases within qualitative approaches to historical research and the organization of the study. Chapter 3 presents a conceivable, constructed childhood and early adulthood of Madam Walker. There are very few documented events in her early life, but the documents that exist are fleshed out to reflect the social context of the time. Chapter 4 is about the beginning of Madam Walker's ideas and products and transports her to St. Louis, Missouri, where she works as a washerwoman until age thirty-six and then moves on to Pittsburgh, where her dreams of building a successful business come to fruition and the company expands regionally. Chapter 5 moves Madam Walker to Indianapolis, her new home. There begin the early stages of her national growth. Madam Walker's social activism is discussed in Chapter 6, and her philanthropy in Chapter 7. The end of Madam Walker's life and her legacy are discussed in Chapter 8, and, finally, a conclusion, Chapter 9, discusses the Smith Model for adult education based on Madam Walker's successful approach to educating women and transforming communities.

CHAPTER 3

The Breedlove Family

Sarah Breedlove McWilliams Walker—Madam C.J. Walker—was born on December 23, 1867. She was the youngest child of Owen and Minerva Breedlove. Sarah also had an older sister, Louvenia, and an older brother, Alex. Since Sarah was born in freedom, just after the Civil War, she was "different" from her parents and siblings, all of whom had been born as slaves. Before the Civil War, Sarah's family was the chattel or property of Robert W. Burney (Bundles 19). Sarah's parents chose to continue to live on the Burney plantation after slavery ended with the Emancipation Proclamation. Burney's plantation, known as Grand View, was a one-thousand-acre cotton plantation in Delta, Louisiana, which sat on the banks of the Mississippi River. Across the Mississippi River, was the growing town of Vicksburg, Mississippi.

The family lived in a stark shanty, a slave shack that they had lived in before the Civil War had started. Their cabin provided a standard of living only slightly above living outdoors. The Burney family, their former owners, talked about sharing the land with their former slaves in a practice called sharecropping, soon after the Federal Government announced that former slaves would receive forty acres and a mule in order to begin a new life. They never received the forty acres, nor did they receive a mule. By the time Sarah was four years old, Owen and Minerva probably could not tell the difference between life under slavery and life during Reconstruction days.

Sharecropping did not uproot or choke out slavery; it became a hybrid graft, a shaft of slavery. The exploitive systems that supported slavery were whitewashed and put

in place for sharecropping—a racist wolf in a Southern sheepskin. The illiterate Breedloves, with few skills and no education to offer employers in other areas, felt they had to accept staying where they were and had become peas or pawns in another racist shell game. Reconstruction and sharecropping sodden the nation with hatred watered by racial tension that surpassed the anger of the Civil War era.

A white backlash began to form a groundswell and it was not long before the Breedloves and millions of other newly freed slaves realized that their dreams for justice and freedom had become a living nightmare. After seven years of sharecropping, Owen and Minerva faced their worst and most ironic fear: for them, freedom was just a different type of slavery and oppression. (20)

A Girl Named Sarah

Sarah could not believe what the old folks around her were saying. She did not understand how life could have been harder during slavery and bullwhipping days. The Breedlove family was very poor; consequently, five-year-old Sarah's labor was needed for the family to survive.

With each passing day, Sarah was given more responsibilities. For instance, big sister Louvenia taught Sarah how to make ashcakes. Sarah looked forward to her favorite dinner: a gourd-bowl filled with crumbled ashcake with "clabber" or buttermilk poured over it. She was very excited and proud of her new accomplishment and enjoyed learning to make ashcakes. Little did she realize at the time, though, that the daily chore of making ashcakes for dinner now belonged to her. The "fun" that had attracted Sarah to the process of making ash cakes quickly vanished, and making ash cakes became just another chore for Sarah on the Grand View Plantation.

All of the people in Sarah's world lived and worked on the Grand View Plantation. Even though, for economic and practical reasons they had remained on the plantation, they did not allow their extreme poverty to predetermine their potential. Around the fire after a hard day's work, they probably sat and talked about their past and their dreams. Through it all, Sarah must have learned the value of hard work. What Sarah did not know was that she was a part of a large body of midnight-colored people who were moving forward into the new day. While her life may not have looked very different from the early lifetime of her parents, she was on the cusp of a new and dramatic period of time in the United States. She may have walked the same smooth, stone paths that slaves had laid with their bare hands and rubbed smooth with their bare fee, but Sarah was headed in a different direction. Eventually, she would not only walk to the beat of a different drummer, she would lead the parade and create a new path for African American women.

Women's Work

Most of the time during Sarah's early years, women worked at least five-and-a-half days a week. The time that women did not spend in the cotton fields was filled with the type of work that is never complete. Their "extra" chores consisted of making their family's clothes, washing clothes, or doing other odd jobs for a little bit of extra pay. In the 1870s, there were very few job opportunities for black women in the South. If a black woman wanted to work in the fields, however, then work was plentiful. If a black woman wanted to clean and keep house for well-to-do whites, then there was domestic work. The only work at that time, however, that offered a black woman any type of independence and self-determination apart from the domination of whites was that of a

washerwoman. Perhaps realizing that endless hours and days in the fields was getting their family nowhere, Minerva added to her hours of fieldwork and became a washerwoman.

Minerva, a very industrious woman, used her “free” time to supplement her family’s meager sharecropper wages by washing other people’s clothing. In the six years following the end of slavery, she had built up a good reputation.

Sarah, at age five, in addition to being the family’s ashcake producer, was pressed into helping her mother and Louvenia in Minerva’s washerwoman business. This meant that Sarah had even more jobs to do. Bundles describes her new work as follows:

> Saturdays were for laundry, washed in large wooden tubs on the riverbank. From dawn until dark, Sarah, Louvenia and Minerva Breedlove used wooden sticks to beat the soil out of their own clothes and those of the white customers who paid them about one dollar per week. (22)

Into Each Life, a Little Rain Must Fall

Older people who lived and worked with the Breedloves on the plantation said that it was one of the worst times they could remember. It was definitely the hottest, most humid summer the seven-year-old Sarah could remember. There was no relief in sight. The nights were as hot and sticky as the days. Actually, the unusual weather patterns had begun during the very mild winter they’d just passed through. The mild temperatures had been accompanied with heavy rains and winter flooding. The winter rains and winter flooding gave birth to drenching spring rains and flooding. By June, some of the low-lying Delta farmland remained waterlogged. Puddles of stagnant, algae-filled green water dotted the village.

The fields remained too saturated to plant the cotton crop. Insult was added to injury. First, the heavy rains delayed the planting of food crops like potatoes, sweet potatoes, tomatoes, corn and sugar cane. When they did finally get the crops planted, the continued rain retarded the growth of the food crops. The only crop that seemed to thrive in the wet weather conditions was rice, grown in an area south of the Grand View plantation.

Something else thrived in the rain-soaked Delta: mosquitoes! The mosquitoes were very bad; their swarms were much worse than usual. Most of the people that lived on Grand View burned rags soaked in kerosene to drive off the mosquitoes at night. However, the mosquitoes were so abundant that they ran rampant during the early mornings. These bold and blood-hungry mosquitoes managed to conquer the remaining protective kerosene fog. They attacked their victims in swarms. The mosquitoes were also far more than a nuisance: they carried the deadly yellow fever. Yellow fever gripped the marshy, swampy lands of the Mississippi and Louisiana Deltas. In the color-conscious South, contagious illnesses were among the few entities that did not discriminate. Yellow fever did not care if you were black or white, rich or poor, sharecropper or landowner, male or female. People from every part of the area were sick. It was an ironic act of fate that there was not a large cotton crop that year because, for the first time, there were not enough healthy field hands to work in the fields. The Breedloves were no exception to the yellow fever and its deadly aftermath. Louvenia, Alex and Sarah kept a deathwatch like the slaves only too recently had kept night watch on New Year's Eve. The three Breedlove children watched and prayed throughout each

day and night. They watched as both parents, Owen and Minerva, died within weeks of each other.

By 1874, the year that Sarah was seven, the Breedlove children were orphans. Louvenia was 12 and Alex 10. Yet, their circumstances were not special to them. Many families lost more than one family member to the yellow fever epidemic that year. In fact, complete families had been wiped out by the fever. Owen and Minerva Breedlove were just two of the hundreds of Southerners who died during the yellow fever epidemic of 1874. (23)

The reality of being orphans quickly struck the Breedlove children. Louvenia believed that they should stay and work the land their parents had dreamed of owning. However, Alex decided that he had had enough of working 14 to 16 hours a day with only pennies to show for his efforts. He moved on to Vicksburg to find work (23). Later on, Alex left the South completely and moved to the West, wanting to be completely away from the South. The Breedlove girls worked as sharecroppers without the strong backs or assistance of any adults. It was not that their kinfolks and neighbors turned their backs on the Breedlove girls; rather, everyone was living on the brink of starvation. No one could help the girls. To survive, they had to help themselves. Louvenia and Sarah also tried to maintain their mother's laundry customer base. However, trying to work as both sharecroppers and washerwomen was more ambitious than practical. Incredibly, or perhaps miraculously, the Breedlove girls managed to survive for four years as sharecroppers. However, they lived during this time at death's door.

In 1878, yellow fever struck again. Between July and November, more than 3,000 people around Vicksburg died in the region's worst epidemic yet (23). In the last

four years, according to Bundles, everyone in the village had lost someone to the two yellow-fever epidemics. During this time, there was also a ravaging malaria epidemic, a disease also brought by mosquitoes. Now, it was time for nature to rub more salt into the terrible wounds of loss suffered by the people: the boll weevil wreaked havoc on the cotton crop. This terrible year there was no cotton crop; no cotton crop meant that there was not a cash crop to take to the market. No cash crop was the straw that broke the Burney Plantation's back—the final nail in its coffin. How ironic life had become. The Burney Plantation had withstood pleas for mercy and humaneness from its slaves and from its national government. The plantation owners had turned a cold eye and closed ear to the tears of thousands of slaves and had survived the ravages of the Civil War. Ironically, two tiny insects, the mosquito and the boll weevil, brought down and crushed the Burney Plantation and most others in Louisiana and Mississippi. The mosquito and boll weevil did what humans could not do: they changed the fate of Sarah and her fellow neighbors. The changes they faced were certainly an act of nature but the Breedlove family's faith must have also made them wonder if the changes they suddenly faced were acts of God.

For the most part, blacks who lived on the Burney Plantation could not read or write. However, they were adept at reading the handwriting on the wall—their ability to interpret the message they had been sent spelled disaster for the Burney family. More importantly, it spelled disaster for the blacks who lived on the plantation. According to Bundles:

> To make matters worse, the cotton crop failed that year. With no work and no money, thousands of blacks, including the Breedlove girls, lost their

> homes. They had no choice but to move across the river where Louvenia hoped she could find work as a washerwoman or a servant. (23-24)

Packing up the Village

The African "village" on the Grand View Plantation was the only world that Sarah Breedlove knew. Family and community gave her a bequest and legacy for a lifetime. The heritage they passed on to her provided a strong set of values and strong principles. These values went far beyond any monetary measure. The village gave Sarah a heritage of strength in the face of adversity. While they appeared helpless and sometimes docile, they were strong enough to survive and strong enough to dare to dream. The people in her village taught her how to become powerful. Her family and village gave her an exaggerated work ethic that could not be challenged or exhausted. Her parents and the village gave her a sense of victory and faith in God and demanded that her faith in God be complemented with an equally strong faith in herself. While education was considered contraband, Sarah knew that the secrets of education were coveted by all. They who had been so deprived of opportunity gave Sarah a thirst for personal advancement, a situation about which they could not even dream at her same age. In the absence of all material possessions, they gave her the power to dream for the future.

Owen and Minerva Breedlove, their kinfolks and their neighbors gave Sarah the spirit and ability to endure many hardships. They prepared her to endure insults and injustices. The Burney Plantation prepared Sarah to survive atrocities that would be heaped on her because of her race and gender. Her village then, as most African American communities have continued to carry on the traditions of early African slaves

and then free communities, believed that if there were the slightest possibility that the next generation would benefit from their suffering, then the suffering was worth it. Early African-based villages in the South were filled with people who lived, suffered and sometimes died for the benefit of the next generation.

Across the Mighty River

Knowing that they had to leave the plantation to survive, Sarah and Louvenia moved into the crowded colored shanty section of Vicksburg. They had very little money and knew that they had to find work immediately. The two seasoned washerwomen; Louvenia, age 16 and Sarah, age 11, took the bull by the horns. Quickly, the two enterprising girls retraced the steps of their mother's laundry business and reclaimed many of her former customers. They worked long, hard hours; and the word spread quickly that the Breedlove sisters were an excellent team of washerwomen. They quickly built a good name for themselves—the Breedlove girls were the washerwomen to get if you wanted your laundry done properly.

Washing customers were not the only ones to find an extra interest in one of the girls: Willie Powell also took note of Louvenia and they were soon married. For some reason or group of reasons, however, Willie and Sarah did not get along. When she spoke of him, Sarah referred to him as "cruel." By age fourteen, Sarah had had enough of living with Willie Powell and wanted a home of her own.

Different Village, Different Home, Different Life

Something about the man was so different from all the other men who tried to talk Sarah into going with her; he was handsome, lean and over six feet tall. Moses "Jeff" McWilliams had skin the color of rich black coffee with lots of cream in it. A minister said a few words to the couple. They kissed, and then they jumped the broom and began their life together.

Moses and Sarah moved into one of the shanty-shacks in Vicksburg's colored community. The building was not much, but it was more than Sarah and Moses had ever had before to call their own. Moses worked as a day laborer—most of the time as a field hand and sometimes at one of the cotton gins. Sarah continued to work as a washerwoman, occasionally, as a maid, and, at times, she worked as a cook.

Sarah also had something special to pray about because she and Moses wanted a baby. After four years of marriage, her prayers were answered when, at last, Sarah Breedlove McWilliams gave birth to baby daughter. Named Lelia, the daughter of Sarah and Moses promptly began growing like a weed. By the time she was 18 months old, Lelia was the treasured little darling of Sarah and Moses' life. Days spent with their baby girl were probably the happiest days of their lives.

Unfortunately, economic times were not as happy as their personal lives were. The cotton crop for the whole Delta area had not recovered from the boll weevil outbreak that had driven Sarah and Louvenia from the Burney Plantation and into Vicksburg. Consequently, Moses was forced to travel farther and farther away from home in order to find work.

The Saddest Days

The summer of 1887 was different: something grim in the air brought back memories of the harsh summer of 1874 when Sarah's parents died from yellow fever. In 1887, a different type of fever, but just as deadly, spread across Mississippi and other parts of the Deep South. The deadly fever was Jim Crow-legislated racism. Reconstruction was dead and the subsequent white backlash was repressive. Just one generation after slavery had ended; an evil cloud rolled over the South and rained injustice on the flat rock of the Mississippi Delta. Thus began the reign of terror during the Jim Crow era that poured injustices on African Americans that included indiscriminate hangings, burnings and killings of African Americans by gangs of white men.

All that hot, humid summer long, trouble brewed at the cotton gin in Greenwood, Mississippi. Very little about the events of that fateful summer have been recorded, so few details are known. It is believed that during some type of racial conflict in Greenwood that summer, Sarah and Lelia's beloved Moses was killed. Sarah rarely spoke about the death of Moses McWilliams, but right after his death, the 20-year-old widow decided to make some important changes in her life.

Sarah wanted to start a new life, fresh and free of the hatred of the South. She wanted to learn how to read and write and to have an education for Lelia. Those dreams could never happen in Vicksburg, Mississippi, or in Louisiana. None of her dreams, none of Moses' dreams could ever come to fruition if she remained in Mississippi or Louisiana. Sarah, like the millions of other blacks in the South, had heard of the Exodus Movement. This Black Migration had begun after slavery but had increased during the

racial tensions. Southern blacks were fed up with Jim Crow racism with its surge of lynching, lack of educational opportunities and the void of human rights. First by tens, then by hundreds and finally by thousands, blacks began the second migration from the South. Sarah and Lelia became two of the thousands.

It seemed like life was better up North, and Sarah wanted Lelia to grow up in a better place. She purchased a one-way boat ticket for herself and 18-month-old Lelia. They were leaving the South, and Sarah chose St. Louis, Missouri as their first destination away.

At 20, Sarah Breedlove McWilliams left Mississippi behind. She had experienced the hard life of sharecropping, the loss of both parents and the cruelties of her brother-in-law in the first fourteen years of her life. Since then, she had also experienced the joy, pleasure and beauty of love, marriage and the motherhood of a beautiful child who looked like her husband. She had, unfortunately, also experienced the pain of the death of her husband. Within six short years, Sarah had become a wife, a mother and a widow. Now, she was taking the steps necessary to solve some of her problems.

Whether Sarah processed it like this or not, her conclusions were probably the same. Sarah believed that her sorrows were directly related to being black and living in the South. Her troubles also directly related to her race, gender and location. She could not change the social, economic and political conditions in the South, but she could change her proximity to the South. Sarah and Lelia left Mississippi in 1887, not knowing that she was a part of the first generation of freeborn blacks who were leaving the South. These African Americans left the atrocities of the Night Riders and economic injustice of

Jim Crow legislated racism. Sarah and Lelia headed away and to points North, then East, Mid-West and West.

Gateway to a New World

When Sarah first saw St. Louis, she could not believe her eyes. Vicksburg was barely a one-horse town compared to what she saw in St. Louis. As she and her 18-month-old daughter arrived at this important town, Sarah did not know that she had picked an oasis and a place of new frontiers for African Americans. From the dock where their riverboat had landed, Sarah saw a bustling city that seemed overflowing with activity. She did not know that St. Louis was considered the intersection to the country's newly expanding western states of Kansas, Colorado, Oklahoma and California. When Sarah and Lelia arrived, the city's population was over 500,000, of those; 35,000 were African Americans (Bundles 30).

> St. Louis's African American community was thriving. African Americans owned three newspapers and over 100 businesses. Hundreds and perhaps thousands of African American women worked as maids, cooks, and, of course, washerwomen. Sarah would be one more African American washerwoman in St. Louis, but she knew that she would be the best. (30)

Sarah and Lelia probably settled in East St. Louis, Illinois. East St. Louis was a very different world from the Burney plantation and Vicksburg. Although Sarah had just moved to a city where she knew no one, she somehow made connections with a group of persons who had a positive impact upon her life. She became a member of St. Paul African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME). This church was widely respected and had

contacts throughout the black district of St. Louis and East St. Louis. A'Lelia Perry Bundles states:

> Established in 1840, St. Paul AME was the first St. Louis church planned, built, and financed by blacks. Defying the pre-Civil War law that forbade blacks to learn to read and write, St. Paul AME sponsored a secret school for its members and it had long extended its aid to newcomers of the city, helping them find houses and jobs and supplying them with clothing and other necessities. (32)

St. Paul AME Church was probably very attractive to Sarah because of its educational opportunities. Many African Americans, including Sarah, acquired basic and rudimentary literacy skills from other African Americans rather than from public schools or formal literacy programs.

> She succeeded in getting enough learning in her town and city to understand its value. Later on when the [sic] madam went to St. Louis, Mo., she followed up her strong desire for education. (*Freeman*: "America's Foremost Colored Woman" 1)

Sarah was not alone in her desire for an education. She echoed the growing choir of blacks throughout the South. James Anderson states:

> Blacks emerged from slavery with a strong belief in the desirability of learning to read and write. This belief was expressed in the pride with which they talked of other ex-slaves who learned to read or write in slavery and the esteem in which they held literate blacks… The former slaves' fundamental belief in the value of literate culture was expressed

> most clearly in their efforts to secure schooling for themselves and their children. Virtually every account by historians or contemporary observers stresses the ex-slaves demand for universal schooling. (5)

Work in the Big City

Sarah saw African American women walking with large empty baskets on the tops of their heads and knew that these were washerwomen. One of the selling points as she had made her decision to move to St. Louis was that women in the city made as much as a dollar and fifty cents a week! This wage far outpaced the wages of a washerwoman in Vicksburg. Sarah was a survivor and she knew that she could make a living in the city. Minerva had taught her how to be an excellent washerwoman. Sarah knew that she needed a job. Once she and Lelia were settled, she unpacked her trade and joined the hundreds of other poor washerwomen in the city. Sarah was quoted in the *Indianapolis News* in 1915 as saying, “I managed to live because I made up my mind that no woman in St. Louis should be a better washerwoman and foamer than I was” (*Indianapolis News* 21).

A New Window to the World

Thus began Sarah’s move from Vicksburg, Mississippi to St. Louis, Missouri. Sarah lived in St. Louis working as a washerwoman for 13 years. Life was hard, but there were both positives and negatives. One plus was access to educational opportunities for both Lelia and Sarah. Sarah’s greatest accomplishment was enrolling Lelia in school. On and off, Sarah attended night school, too. However, the long and hard hours of scrubbing clothes made consistent attendance difficult. A major minus was John Davis, a man she met and married during that time. In *Madam C.J. Walker, Entrepreneur*, Bundles notes,

“Little is known of her second husband, John Davis. McWilliams rarely spoke of him except to remark that he was a heavy drinker. She apparently divorced him before her daughter went away to college” (31-32).

The year 1900 marked the beginning of a new year, a new decade and a new century. While the world, the United States and Sarah prepared to start the twentieth century. Times were changing. More and more people earned their livelihoods in factories rather than on farms. In the South, blacks and whites left the harsh, unpredictable life of farming to pursue work in the large industrial cities. In 1902, Sarah and Lelia had lived in St. Louis, Missouri for 15 years, and their economic status was not much better than when they had first moved there. By 1904, Sarah was 34 years old and she had been washing clothes, along with other jobs, since she was five years old.

Slavery had ended January 1, 1863, some 41 years earlier, and African Americans had made remarkable accomplishments. However, leaders within African American communities believed that the time was ripe to press ahead for major social and political changes. Ironically, it would be an event that was considered “international” that would become a major catalyst in social change within the African American community and particularly, in Sarah’s life.

In 1904, the World’s Fair came to St. Louis. This great event brought thousands and thousands of visitors from all over the world to St. Louis, Missouri. African American social, political and economic organizations used the World’s Fair as a stage for promoting their agendas. Great leaders of these organizations were Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. DuBois, Paul Laurence Dunbar and T. Thomas Fortune (Bundles 33). They all saw the World’s Fair as a means to furthering their cause of promoting

improvements in educational and living opportunities for all African Americans. For Sarah, a simple visit to the fair would set her on a course that dramatically changed her life and those of thousands of African American women and their families.

One reason that Sarah attended the World's Fair was to see the Colored Pavilion and Exhibit. This exhibit highlighted the history of African Americans in St. Louis, Missouri, the surrounding area and the nation. The exhibit also highlighted the important accomplishments of successful blacks across the nation and sported illustrations and photographs of black colleges, normal schools and churches. Sarah had never seen so much African American history and so many black accomplishments. In conjunction with the World's Fair festivities, many local organizations planned pre-events to capitalize on the crowds and on the World's Fair momentum.

The Mirror of Inspiration

According to Bundles, Sarah attended a pre-event that focused upon women's issues. One organization that dovetailed upon the World's Fair audience was the National Association of Colored Women (NEW). They held a conference in St. Paul's AME Church, Sarah's church. This leading and very distinguished group of colored women was the Who's Who of African American social change advocates, educators and businesswomen. They were the movers and shakers within their local communities.

The NACW group that met there was one of the most distinguished groups of African American women that had ever assembled in one place. The women spoke about the progress and challenges of life for women and children within their communities. The women gathered there were educators and social workers. They had one thing in common; they were very well educated. After several speeches, it was time for the

keynote speaker, Mrs. Margaret Washington, the wife of Booker T. Washington. Mrs. Washington urged the women in the audience to work on the behalf of the race. She urged women to strive and to achieve higher heights. Sarah was not the only person who took note of Mrs. Washington's impressive speech that day. Local newspapers ran a picture and reported on her speech, marking the first time that the white-owned St. Louis Press had featured positive coverage of any black woman (33). Bundles states that Sarah counted the day she heard Mrs. Washington's challenge for the women at that conference to be spearheads for positive change for the race as one of the great turning points of her life.

The year of the World's Fair, 1904, was a pivotal year for Sarah. The women's conference at her church and the Colored Pavilion at the fair had a significant impact upon her thinking about her life and future. Inspired by the panel of distinguished black women, Sarah wanted their elegance and poise. She also wanted their educational confidence and access to wealth. The spark was ignited. Sarah now knew that she wanted to become a fine colored lady of distinction. She wanted to dress and speak like Mrs. Washington. Sarah also wanted the poise and dignity with which Mrs. Washington carried herself. She wanted a circle of friends like the women in the NACW and wanted the respect and admiration that Mrs. Washington had. However, she did not quite know how to achieve all that she wanted. How could a nearly illiterate washerwoman accomplish all of these goals? It's possible and even probable that God was about to supply Sarah with the answers to her questions and the tools to reach all of her goals.

The Dream

Sarah washed her hair in the lye soap residue of her washtub, not knowing that the harsh residue caused her hair to become dry and brittle. The unsanitary conditions of the crowded neighborhood in which she lived also contributed to head and scalp ailments. Consequently, her hair and the hair of many African American women was badly broken off and in many cases, their scalps were bald. Just lately, Sarah's hair condition had worsened. She spent her sparse extra quarters on "wonder" remedies. She bought oils, creams, "magic" potions, tonic waters and any other possible "cure" that she could find.

Sometime after the World's Fair and Women's Conference, Sarah had a dream. This dream became the ultimate catalyst for placing Sarah on a life-changing path. A description of what motivated Sarah to initiate dramatic life changes can be read in a fragment of an unidentified newspaper clipping and also in Bundles' book:

> God answered my prayer, for one night I had a dream and in that dream a big black man appeared to me and told me what to mix up for my hair. Some of the remedy was grown in Africa, but I sent for it, mixed it, put it on my scalp and in a few weeks my hair was coming in faster than it had ever fallen out. I tried it on my friends; it helped them, I made up my mind I would begin to sell it. (35)

Sarah interpreted the dream as a message from God. Consequently, she felt compelled to act upon the dream. However, before she could live the dream, she had to take on and solve the problems of her real world. Despite financial hardships, Sarah managed to save enough money to send Lelia to Knoxville College to study business. In order to earn extra money for Lelia's college education, Sarah began to sell hair care

products part-time for Poro Company, started by Annie Pope-Turnbo Malone, also known as Madam Malone, whom Sarah met in St. Louis through her work as a laundress. As she "took care of business" in her life, saving as much as she could to put Lelia through school, Sarah was also putting together the ingredients for the hair care product for which she had been given the formula in her dream.

Awakening the Dreamer

Sarah was determined that 1905 was going to be her year. However, in May of 1905, Sarah received sad news. Her brother Alex had died. Alex's family lived in Denver, Colorado. Sarah knew that Alex's wife and their four daughters now faced very desperate financial times. Sarah decided to move to Denver so that she could help Alex's family. More importantly, she could grow her own business free from the domination of Madam Malone's company. Bundles describes the life changing decision that Sarah made: "On July 21, 1905, Sarah Breedlove McWilliams Davis arrived at Denver's Union Depot with her savings of $1.50—about a week's pay for her work as a laundress" (36).

Turning points in Sarah's life were often marked by a physical move. After the death of parents and the failure of the cotton crops, she and Louvenia moved to Vicksburg. After her brother-in-law's cruelties drove her to an early (and happy) marriage to Moses McWilliams, she and Moses moved out on their own. After Moses was killed in the summer of 1887, Sarah pulled up stakes and moved to St. Louis. After over seventeen years there, a dream glimmered ahead for her, and her brother's death provided the impetus to move once again—this time to Denver, Colorado. Her time in Denver would open a brand new, exciting chapter in her life—and in this study.

CHAPTER 4

The Seedling

Nearly 18 years to the date of her arrival in St. Louis, Sarah Breedlove McWilliams Davis moved to Denver with the help of St. Paul AME Church. Although Sarah wanted to help support her brother's family, she did not intend to give her life to them. Once she arrived in Denver, she made contact with Shorter AME Church and established an independent living arrangement in a rented room in a building adjoined to the church. Sarah needed a job right away. Providentially, she found a job as a cook for E.L. Scholtz. In the book, *Madam C.J. Walker, Entrepreneur*, Bundles describes E.L. Scholtz as the owner of a well-known, well-equipped pharmacy. Although not known for a certainty, it is more than likely that Scholtz's chemical expertise was crucial to the development and to the perfecting of Sarah's dream-inspired formula for Wonderful Hair Grower, the mixture she devised to help grow hair. According to family records, Scholtz may have advised the future cosmetics tycoon about the ingredients for her first three products: Wonderful Hair Grower, Vegetable Shampoo and Madam C.J. Walker's Glossine. (37)

Denver seemed an unlikely setting for nurturing a poor black woman from the Deep South into a successful African American businesswoman. A growing Western town, Denver was one of the last major stops before the edge of the "final" frontier. Unlike St. Louis, which seemed like a city-within-a-city of many thousands of black people, the only black people around Denver lived in nearby rural pockets of communities. However, Sarah must have believed that she was in the right place.

Before leaving St. Louis, Sarah met and became interested in a man named C.J. (Charles Joseph) Walker, a creative newspaperman with some business expertise. Apparently, Walker followed Sarah to Denver. On January 1, 1906, just over five months after Sarah arrived in Denver, she and C.J. Walker were married (38).

This time, when Sarah got married, she dropped all of her other names: Sarah Breedlove McWilliams Davis became, for business purposes, Madam C.J. Walker. By choosing this name, Madam Walker followed what seems to have been a trend of the times. Many African Americans who lived in the early twentieth century used their initials instead of their names in order to coerce respect from whites. At this time, whites often called blacks by their first names, such as Sarah or Mary, regardless of a black person's age. Most whites refused to say Mr., Mrs., or Miss to African Americans. Instead, whites sometimes used derogatory titles like, *boy* or *girl*, *aunt* or *uncle*, and *pappy* or *mammy*. Although she could not instantly change the reality of personal interaction between blacks and whites, Madam Walker carefully chose a title that demanded respect. By giving herself the less common title of *Madam*, followed by her husband's initials and her new last name, Madam Walker made it impossible for people she met to address her by her first name. In doing so, Madam Walker took control of her own destiny. Her new business became the Madam C.J. Walker Manufacturing Company. The use of *Madam* in place of *Mrs*. also reflected a marketing trend growing among new cosmetics and hair care products companies, many of which chose royal titles, French pronouns and other fancy words to promote themselves and their products.

Trial and Error

Madam Walker lived in Denver for three years, from 1905 to 1908, three very important years for her professional and personal development. Lelia, who had attended and graduated with a degree in business from Knoxville College in Knoxville, Tennessee, moved to Denver to help with her mother's new business. After she entered the business world, Lelia changed her name to A'Lelia. Madam Walker assembled a top-notch staff. C.J., her husband, contributed valuable marketing and advertising expertise. A'Lelia understood bookkeeping and other financial aspects of business. She supervised and mixed products, fulfilled and shipped mail orders and sold products. Alex's wife and their four daughters were part of the kitchen crew. Madam Walker was the central energy within the business; she was the boss, or the head of the company, and the company's primary salesperson. A photograph of A'Lelia is included in the Appendix (Figure 4.1).

Within a few short months, Madam Walker developed her first three products: Madam C.J. Walker's Hair Grower, Madam C.J. Walker's Vegetable Shampoo and Madam C.J. Walker's Glossine. Madam Walker's dream of being her own boss had finally come together. After a few months in Denver, she had established a substantial customer base and considered herself close to devoting all of her time to her new, growing business. However, factors came into play that Madam Walker had not anticipated. One of these unforeseen factors was Denver's winter.

The snowy Denver winters made it impossible for Madam Walker to reach Denver's outlying African American communities. The snows came as early as late September and did not completely melt away until late April or early May. Because most of her clients lived in the small black communities that lay beyond the city limits, Madam

Walker was not able to maintain a year-round, steady client base early in her company's existence.

For this reason, during her first winter in Denver, Madam Walker worked as a live-in cook for Scholtz. During her second winter in Denver, a frustrated Madam Walker gained employment as a live-in maid and cook in a prominent white household. Day-to-day contact with her African American friends and family might have been diminished by the harsh winter snows, but true to form, the United States Postal Service delivered mail through the sleet and snow. Madam Walker wrote C.J. about her anxiousness and frustrations over being forced to put her business on hold. In a letter dated January 11th, (the year is unclear but must have been 1906, 1907 or 1908, the only winters that Madam Walker lived in Denver), she shows her frustration:

> My Dear Sweet C.J.,
>
> Yes, C.J., you are perfectly right. I know it wouldn't be wise to go in business now but this woman I work for is so mean sometimes. I am liable to quit her almost anytime. It is hard to get a place to work now, I am going to stay here until you send for me but when she gets mean I get very impatient and I want to quit. (*Madam Walker Archival Collection*)

Madam Walker might have wanted to quit working for her unpleasant employer, but she was not going to quit realizing her dream of running a successful hair care business.

Marching to the Beat of a Different Drummer

By 1907, Madam Walker had taken steps to ensure that she would not work as a domestic again. She needed to expand her business so that it could carry itself during the

long winter months. Her company's slow period seems to have taught her that a business that maintained the status quo was a business destined never to grow. Madam Walker realized that she needed a larger customer base in order to grow her business. To Madam Walker, this meant that she needed to travel farther from Denver, and she was ready to hit the road.

Madam Walker became a traveling salesperson, or a drummer, a very bold step for the times in which she lived. It was one thing to leave early in the day and to return at night. It was another thing for an African American woman to travel alone throughout the rural Western towns and farm communities. Madam Walker was prepared to stay on the road for weeks and perhaps for months. She carried with her enough of her products to demonstrate to customers and hundreds of mail-order forms. As she traveled, Madam Walker began to think about what might happen if she trained local women to sell her products within their own communities. Having sales teams in distant places would expand her business by growing her sales revenues. Madam Walker began to hire and to train agents to work in the areas where she had developed a customer base. These steps took Madam Walker's business to the next level. However, as Madam Walker's business began to expand, she suffered serious growing pains.

Madam Walker's family, especially C.J., objected to her traveling alone and drumming her products. Her family members were afraid that an African American woman traveling alone would be a target for sexual assault or robbery. Their fears were compounded when she spent long periods of time on the road. One of these times, Madam Walker traveled to Kansas City, Kansas, where a large, successful African American community lived, like in St. Louis. Madam Walker also heard of successful

African American communities in Nebraska, Oklahoma and Iowa. The *Madam Walker Archival Collection* indicates that she communicated with C.J. and A'Lelia both by mail and telegraph. If Madam Walker unexpectedly ran short of funds, she would take a temporary job as a domestic. A colored woman in any part of the country could always find work as a cook or a maid, and Madam Walker was not an exception. She did not let these short, inconvenient detours bother her, but these minor hurdles bothered C.J.

Tying Up Loose Ends

In Madam Walker's absence, C.J. asserted himself as the boss of the company, which did not sit well with either Madam Walker or A'Lelia. C.J.'s imposing himself into his wife's rightful spot became a point of tension between Madam Walker and her husband. Although C.J. had gotten in on the ground floor as an advisor of sorts, Madam Walker did not see him as a partner. She saw C.J., A'Lelia, Alex's wife, and her four nieces as employees. Other bones of contention also existed between C.J. and Madam Walker. C.J. feared taking risks. He hesitated when his wife devoted all of her time to the business. He also feared her traveling alone and so far from Denver. Eventually, the two separated. Clearly, Madam Walker's company could and did survive well without C.J. Walker's continued help. In a 1986 MS. magazine article, A'Lelia Perry Bundles said the following about Madam Walker's business problems with C.J.:

> When I started my business…with my husband, I had business disagreements with him for when I began to make ten dollars a day, he thought that amount was enough and I should be satisfied, she told the *New York Age* [newspaper]. But I was convinced that my preparations would fill a long felt want, and when we found it impossible to agree due

> to his narrowness of vision, I embarked in business for myself. (Bundles *MS.* 93)

C.J. had not experienced the same dream that Madam Walker had experienced, and Madam Walker was protective of her dream and of her business. She would never let a man, even a successful businessman like C.J., take over her business. She hungered for economic empowerment more than she hungered for a husband. C.J. mistakenly thought that he was indispensable to Madam Walker when, actually, his influence with Madam Walker had begun to wane even before the business crisis that was brought on by this power struggle.

Madam Walker had heard talk that C.J. was cheating on her. Even though it was he who was wronging her, in one letter located in the Indianapolis Archives, Madam Walker wrote to C.J. that she assumed responsibility for the tension between them in their personal life. C.J. was slick: he had "brainwashed" Madam Walker, convincing her of his innocence and convincingly denying that he was guilty of any extramarital affairs. He had convinced her that any marital stresses in their relationship were the results of Madam Walker spending long stretches of time on the road. He also convinced her that many of their problems were the result of her "unfounded" jealousy. Apparently, by some means, Madam Walker finally became convinced that her former suspicions were well founded because she decided she must free herself from C.J. They separated while they were living in Denver, probably in 1907. While she knew that they could not live together, Madam Walker still cared deeply for C.J. The following letter, from the Madam C.J. Walker Archival Collection, was written after they had been separated for several years:

> January 11, 1912
>
> I cannot get interested in no one else…. Charles, I love you because you [are] a big, sensible, strong businessman…. I believe I could be happy with your love only. You know how to rule me with kindness. If you go through life using that tact you will always rule me. (Box 2, Folder 4)

Sadly, her letter did not bring about reconciliation: the couple legally divorced in 1912. Years later, C.J. realized that he could have lived in the lap of luxury if he had only remained faithful to Madam Walker. After their separation, C.J. shadowed Madam Walker across the country. Later, after their divorce, he shadowed her in another way—he professionally "stalked" her business. C.J. set up his own business with a deliberately similar name, the C.J. Walker Manufacturing Company, and he used Madam Walker's formulas for his own company's products.

Apparently, C.J. felt that he had a right to use the formulas and any marketing ideas that he had developed with Madam Walker. However, to combat C.J.'s efforts to undermine her business, Madam Walker initiated legal action against C.J. In addition, she began an advertising campaign to address C.J.'s sound-alike business. In the Appendix, there is an ad promising a seal guaranteeing Madam Walker's products (Figure 4.2).

C.J. remarried after the divorce became final in 1912 but tried to remain emotionally close to Madam Walker. For example, whenever he learned of one of her accomplishments, he wrote heaping praises to her. Perhaps he wanted to see if any sparks of their love remained. Written six years after their divorce, the following letter, from the archives, provides an example:

September 25, 1918

> I trust that you may live long to enjoy it—Villa Lewaro as you have the proud distinction of accomplishing what no other Negro woman has ever accomplished and I am sure you are proud and happy. And I am sure that your mind reflects to [unclear word] hup [how?] [not?] many years ago when you were almost in poverty and could only have a vision [and] have gone far beyond you[r] expectations. I two [too] have often thought of how we discussed these visions together, it is not so pleasant for me now to think of these where it necessitates my thinking also of the great mistakes that I have mad [sic] in my life however I shall try and do the best I can in these older days of mine. Well I shall not further discuss my misfortunes or mistakes as I myself only is to Blame [sic], for your part I must give you much praise for you[r] womanhood your pluck your push and your determination with that you have pushed forward until you have reached the highest place in society and wealth among our people a people a place you rightfully deserve. (Box 1, Folder 12)

Although C.J.'s letters may have had emotional impact on Madam Walker, they did not carry any professional impact, and the relationship between Madam Walker and C.J. was never renewed. Madam Walker's legal counsel was always justifiably suspicious of C.J. After Madam Walker's death, C.J. inquired whether or not he had been mentioned in Madam Walker's will. Madam Walker's legal counsel responded with this letter:

> June 7, 1919
>
> Madam at one time had you in the will but she made changes. You, I think will admit, however, that whatever you lost, you have no one to blame but yourself for it. (Box 2, Folder 4)

Eight months later, C.J. wrote Madam Walker's legal counsel and demanded his fair share of her estate. Madam Walker's attorney responded with this brazen letter:

> Circa February 20, 1920
>
> I was just wondering if you were forgetful of the fact that you had married Mrs. Larrue that the two of you set up business in Louisville, that you taught her all you knew about the business that you subsequently taught other women, and we have it here that you sold the formula to others and remember this, how could you expect to go in court even if you had not signed away your rights, if you ever had any. Madam said that she would spend her last penny to fight you. (Box 2, Folder 4)

Ironically, C.J. continued to sell Madam Walker's products until his death (Bundles *Entrepreneur* 51).

Cutting a New, Smooth Stone Path

The years in Denver between 1905 and 1908 afforded Madam Walker the time to organize, structure, and refine her business operations. She increased her business's capacity by listening to her gut and her "mother-wit" intuitions. Madam Walker knew what African American women needed in the line of hair care products. African American women wanted to look and feel attractive. However, they did not have the financial wherewithal to spend exorbitant amounts of money on beauty care products.

Madam Walker understood. She sold high quality products at prices that middle class and poor African American women could afford. Madam Walker's business became the first successful beauty care company that gave African American women what they truly wanted.

By 1907, a substantial portion of Madam Walker's revenues were generated through mail order sales. She installed a system that insured that all mail order customers received their products within a very timely period. Madam Walker's attention to details and her excellent customer service paid off in a very big way:

> Her success was immediate. In less than one year she was doing a business of $25-to-$35 per week. Fully satisfied of [sic] the value of her preparations through experiments and testimony, she concluded [sic] to travel through the country—to demonstrate, to sell goods, and to appoint agents. As a drummer she was a great success. (Knox 1)

By 1908, Madam Walker had three very successful years under her belt. Now, she was ready for larger challenges and bigger risks. Her first challenge was to reach more African American women. Madam Walker thought that she could sell more products if she had African American women working for her as agents. Madam Malone and other African American beauty care companies hired women to sell their products. The agents received commissions based on their sales. Madam Walker was familiar with this concept because she had once been an agent for Madam Malone's Poro Company. Madam Walker had no difficulty finding good, hard-working women to help her sell her products. What African American woman in 1908 did not want to make more than a $1.50 to $2.25 a week? Once Madam Walker identified the missing link of training

African American women to sell her products to generate higher sales, everything else seemed to fall into place. In *Madam C.J. Walker: Cosmetics Tycoon,* Bundles states:

> On the road, Sarah Walker was doing more than selling; she was training agents who could demonstrate and take orders for Walker products in return for a share of the profits. By the spring of 1908, she had signed on dozens of representatives and brought the company's monthly income to $400. (Bundles 39)

East of the Mississippi

In 1908, as in the present, "location, location, location" was everything. Denver was the perfect location to pilot and to test Madam Walker's products and she and her company were able to do that. However, the African American population in the Denver area was very small. Madam Walker realized that if she wanted her business to grow significantly, then she had to relocate her business east of the Mississippi in a thriving industrial city. She needed a city in which African American women were employed in a variety of occupations. She was not ready for New York City. She did not have a good feeling about Chicago nor did she want to go head-to-head with Madam Malone's established beauty care business in St. Louis. Madam Walker toured the East. One city she visited was Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and Pittsburgh, along with its African American business community, made a strong impression on Madam Walker.

In many ways, Pittsburgh was very similar to St. Louis. It was exciting. Pittsburgh's opportunities hung in the air as thickly as its industrial smoke. Pittsburgh had a good climate for African American business development. Layton Leroy Howard wrote in the *Pennsylvania Negro Business Directory, 1910* that "neither nationality nor color

stands in the way of employment" (Howard 29). The employment climate and the pleasant racial atmosphere in Pennsylvania were excellent for African Americans. In 1908, Pennsylvania led the North in African American population. Pennsylvania was a mineral mining and refining state. Layton Leroy Howard wrote that it was rare to find one of the over 500 steel and iron ore mills that did not employ African Americans on various levels. According to the *Pennsylvania Negro Business Directory, 1910,* African Americans had bank deposits of over $547,000, and their net worth was in excess of $3,450,000. The same book also states that "four persons, one of whom is a woman, have a combined wealth of over $300,000" (Howard 32).

Madam Walker learned that many African American women worked in Pittsburgh as domestic servants, laborers in the mills, and factory workers. She considered it good for her that hard-working African American women were employed in various positions. She also learned that African American women earned between $3.75 and $4.50 per day, almost double what they earned in the Denver area (Jackson 12). Knowing that wages were so much higher in Pittsburgh was also welcome news to Madam Walker. She soon relocated her business headquarters to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Growth in Pittsburgh: The Next Level

Pittsburgh's African American population was approximately 40,000. Madam Walker was impressed by the great deal of accomplishment this small population had achieved. Pittsburgh had a diverse, prosperous African American business core. *The Pennsylvania Negro Business Directory* listed a comprehensive description of the African American businesses in Pittsburgh when Madam Walker arrived:

> Barbers, 20; restaurants and hotels, 25; groceries, poultry, etc., 10; poolrooms, 10; saloons and cafes, 5; printers, 5; pharmacies, 5; undertakers and livery, 4; confectioners and bakeries, 3; caterers, 3; contractors and builders, 1; fish and game dealers, 2; manufacturing, 1; news dealers, 1; hair stores, 5; shoe dealer, 1; insurance companies, 2; newspapers, 1; manicurist, 20; chiropodists, 5; upwards of 2,500 Negroes own their homes and other realty. (Howard 32)

Madam Walker wanted to not only fit into Pittsburgh's African American business community, she also wanted to impress, inspire, and lead Pittsburgh's African American business community. She accomplished her goals within a short time. First, she oversaw the construction of a manufacturing plant for her products. Second, she designed a beauty parlor that outstripped any in the East.

The First Beauty Parlor Experiment

Madam Walker's gala introduction to Pittsburgh's African American business community was the premier opening of a beauty parlor and hair care salon, located at 2518 Wylie Avenue (39). Madam Walker's first hair care salon was more than the talk of the town. It was a place where African American women could come to have their hair professionally styled and their fingernails and toenails professionally manicured. Madam Walker's beauty parlor was a social place. African American women gathered there and enjoyed each other's company and learned from each other. In Madam Walker's beauty parlor, women were free to gossip and share stories while being pampered and treated like royalty. Madam Walker's hair care and beauty care salon was Pittsburgh's most posh setting for African American women. The stylish, first class facility quickly became a

noteworthy establishment. Without delay, Madam Walker was recognized as an innovative and successful businesswoman.

The Transition from Work to Profession

Madam Walker's first hair care and beauty care salon exceeded all of her expectations. She soon realized that she could use her beauty care salon as a model for African American women who wanted to start a similar business of their own.

From starting a new salon, Madam Walker learned something that very few women, black or white, had experienced. She felt the overwhelmingly rewarding power and energy that comes from taking a business concept all the way from birth to reality. The conception, the design and the implementation of the Pittsburgh beauty care complex was a long, creative, learning process. Madam Walker had not experienced this energizing power when she started her business in Denver. In the process of opening her hair parlor and beauty care salon in Pittsburgh, she experienced something that she wanted other African American women to feel, too.

The beauty parlor and the hair care salon forced Madam Walker to attend to every business detail herself. For months, she ate, slept, and dreamt of the beauty parlor and the hair care salon. She selected the best location and designed the interior of the parlor, choosing colors and textures that would best create, in her opinion, an ambiance of class and distinction. She used her mind to calculate and visualize the wall space that would be used. Throughout each day, she made numerous business decisions, interacting with other businesspersons who also owned beauty care equipment and related supply companies. After touring vendor warehouses, she selected sinks for washing hair, dryers, chemicals, and all of the other materials her new business needed. This learning experience from

creating a business of her own began to transform Madam Walker in a very exciting way that was different from earning wages on a job.

The process boosted Madam Walker's self-confidence and self-esteem; it must have made her feel important and intelligent. Mastering the business process gave her a source of pride. Opening her business had a transforming effect upon her customers and the surrounding community, as well. Madam Walker became aware of how the opening of a top-of-the-line, attractive business could be a source of pride for a community and could draw out people within the African American community and bring them closer together. Empirically, Madam Walker came to know business ownership's transformative power for the owner, for the business's clientele and also for the local community.

Madam Walker witnessed the ripple effect that business ownership could have throughout a community. Business development impacted the economic status of the business owner and impacted the community in which the business owner lived. Madam Walker believed that through her company, she could share the positive effects she was experiencing. She could show African American women how to attain business ownership and experience what she had experienced—improvements in their self-confidence, self-esteem, and pride. Salon owners would be able to earn a decent living and could impact their communities in the same manner that she had impacted hers. Madam Walker realized that very few African American women could start their business with the grandeur of her new salon. She had acquired the means for building her manufacturing building and beauty salon through years of financial success and personal difficulty. However, it was possible to start a business at a lower level than her Pittsburgh complex.

Reasoning that very few African American women could afford to rent a place for a hair care salon, Madam Walker believed her hair culturists could start businesses within their own homes. After all, she had started in her kitchen and had later moved her business into her parlor room. She believed that a hair care salon could be tailored to fit any sized budget that a hard-working, determined woman could scrape together. She honestly believed that business ownership was within the reach of any interested African American woman.

Owning their own salon was ideal for African American women who did not want to base their earnings only on commissions. Also, there were women who wanted to sell Madam Walker products but did not want to go door to door with the products. If a woman owned her own beauty care salon, her customers came to her for their hair care and for the Madam Walker products she could sell them. The idea of having other women open Madam-Walker-style salons had potential for both the women who would open the salons and for Madam Walker's manufacturing company to increase sales. However, Madam Walker had to determine how her idea could be accomplished.

Two things had to happen in order for Madam Walker's idea to become a successful reality. First, there needed to be an ample supply of Madam Walker products. Second, Madam Walker needed to develop a system and build an organization dedicated to educating African American women in her own methods of the profession of cosmetology. When Madam Walker moved her headquarters to Pittsburgh, she had constructed the manufacturing plant that was dedicated to the production of her products, so having enough of her products would involve an increase of production efforts in the

plant. That left only one more “river to cross.” Madam Walker had to design and implement an adult education process.

The Lelia College of Beauty Culture

Because she desired to educate and train adults, Madam Walker envisioned an adult learning center that she soon named the Lelia College of Beauty Culture. Lelia College became the adult education vehicle through which Madam Walker taught African American women how to own and manage a hair care and beauty care salon. Lelia College was the first centralized location where she taught women how to work as cosmetologists, and it was the realization of Madam Walker’s plan to facilitate the economic independence of African American women.

In 1908, college was an opportunity for very few African American women, and the fields of teaching and nursing were about the only professional opportunities available. Only a select few self-employed African American businesswomen existed at this time.

As more and more African American women moved into the cities and worked in industrial settings, Madam Walker realized that there were other opportunities for African American women to enter the ranks of trained professionals who provided services to the growing numbers of working women. Along with nursing and teaching, offering professional cosmetology services would require more education in order to enter the ranks of properly trained cosmetologists. A sixth grade education was required to become initiated into the field of cosmetology, which was considered a profession. Cosmetology offered a woman more financial rewards, independence and potential for business ownership than almost any other available field. In 1908, cosmetology and its related

supporting lines of work were fast becoming excellent vocational trades for African American women.

Madam Walker's plan centered on her product line and on developing professional cosmetologists, and in 1908, the time was right. The social context was ripe for Madam Walker to put her plan into effect. No one had ever thought of teaching African American women how to determine, direct and control their own economic future through business ownership. Madam Walker not only thought of such a possibility, she believed she knew how to make it work. According to Bundles:

> In the summer of 1908, Sarah Walker's daughter joined her in Pittsburgh. Together, the women opened a beauty parlor and a training school for Walker agents, which they called Lelia College. A graduate from the school would be known, they decided, as a Hair Culturist. (Bundles 40)

Madam C.J. Walker's plan, which her daughter A'Lelia helped her to implement, was to help other women step off into a bright new world of their own making. She had no idea, at the time, that she would be helping over 20,000 women transform themselves into entrepreneurs, their families into successes, and their communities into places of cooperation and pride.

The Development of Lelia College

Lelia College solved some of Madam Walker's most challenging problems. How could she ensure that all of her sales agents had sufficient training in the basics of African American beauty culture and the science of hair care? How could Madam Walker individually train her sales agents without the training process consuming all of her time? How could all of Madam Walker's agents attain the same high caliber and

comprehensive education? The solutions to all of these problems came to her via the education and training offered at Lelia College.

Madam Walker decided that Lelia College would have two distinct tracks. The first track was two-pronged. At Lelia College, African American women learned the art and science of beauty culture. More importantly, they learned how to own and manage a multi-dimensional beauty care facility. The second prong of the first track concerned sales. Lelia College offered African American women the opportunity to acquire sales and marketing skills. With the opening of Lelia College, the Madam C.J. Walker Manufacturing Company set itself apart from, and ahead of, the other African American beauty care and hair care manufacturers. After being in business slightly over three years, Madam C.J. Walker Manufacturing Company was in a leadership role within its industry—it was not simply offering a product for sale, it was offering the means and training to use those products as bootstraps to pull women, their families, and their communities from poverty into a higher economic class. Through Madam Walker's vision, over 20,000 women were led onto higher economic ground, far away from their quagmires of overwork and low pay.

Lelia College was a vocational trade college that included an emphasis on the nuts and bolts of the fine art of beauty culture and business ownership. Madam Walker's target audience for Lelia College was African American women who could not afford to attend a black college. Therefore, Madam Walker ensured that her college was financially accessible. Educational standards for entry were also flexible: any black woman who had at least a sixth grade education was free to attend. Other criteria included honesty and a

good reputation, along with the ability and desire to work hard. Classes at Lelia College ran for a minimum of six hours a day. Tuition was $25.00.

Although the minimum amount of schooling was sixth grade, Madam Walker observed that schoolteachers, wives and daughters of professionals and businessmen quickly became students at Lelia College. But what about the women who were like Madam Walker before she started her company? What about the black women who were domestics, cooks, washerwomen, or factory workers? Was Lelia College out of their reach? These women were “sisters in the struggle” to Madam Walker. Madam Walker did not forget working mothers or other women who had to make a living during the day: for them, she offered the second prong of her first track: a night school, which took longer to complete than the day program. The night school track, however, was as comprehensive as the day school and cost the same, $25.00.

Madam Walker was also conscious of the dreams of African American women who lived outside Pittsburgh. For them, she developed the second track of her plan: Lelia College Correspondence Course. It also cost $25.00, and correspondence students received the same materials and study guides as the day and night students. Of course, they missed the dynamic teaching presence of Madam Walker, A’Lelia, the sisterhood of cohorts, and the state-of-the-art facility. Madam Walker touched base with these women when she traveled to their areas.

Each student would receive a Madam Walker Outfit, which included everything that a woman needed to become a hair culturist. A course book, a detailed packet of instruction sheets, a pressing iron, and an ample supply of Madam Walker products were

all included in the “outfit.” Madam Walker attended to every detail. Then she had to wait while she pondered, “Will they come?”

C.J. had taught Madam Walker how to best use local newspapers. As a result, Madam Walker purchased advertisements in African American newspapers in the Pittsburgh metropolitan area. In the Appendix, there is a Madam Walker ad from an African American newspaper (Figure 4.3).

Lelia College was an instant success. For one hectic year, archival records indicate that Lelia College enrollment grew quickly. African American women came from near and far to attend the new college. Madam Walker then hired some of her outstanding graduates to work in her salon, freeing A’Lelia to work in the college. Within a very short period of time, A’Lelia became the primary instructor at Lelia College. Because A’Lelia held a college degree, her education added to the credibility of Lelia College. A’Lelia’s presence was crucial to Madam Walker’s potential success with the college. Madam Walker depended upon A’Lelia’s multiple skills and abilities to manage many of the company’s vital operations. First, A’Lelia managed the beauty care and hair salon. Second, she supervised the manufacturing processes for their various products. Third, she supervised the mail-order fulfillment department. Without A’Lelia, the college might not have been nearly as successful as it was.

Adult Education for the Economic Independence of African American Women

Madam Walker originally intended to create a business for herself but soon realized that she could not single-handedly reach all of the women in the marketplace. Consequently, the brilliant entrepreneur devised the means to reach African American

women all over the country. Madam Walker developed a system capable of providing opportunities through resources and training to any African American woman with the desire to become a Madam Walker Hair Culturist:

> [She] never loses an opportunity to emphasize to her sisters the importance of getting into the world of business, of acquiring a foothold in the soil, making themselves financially independent and setting an example for all people of thrift, industry and the practical application of their mental training. (Knox 1)

In order to help African American women ensure that they would make the most of every opportunity in their chosen field, Madam Walker made certain that they all had training in every aspect of the business. Before Lelia College students could graduate, they had to demonstrate proficiency in total care of their patron's hair, scalp and skin. They spent many hours learning anatomy and how to maintain clean, profitable beauty shops before they were taught to cut and style hair. (Knox 1)

Madam Walker developed a variety of learning experiences and opportunities for African American women to become professionally and economically successful. She did this for several reasons. First, Madam Walker sincerely wanted to help other women earn a better income. Second, she had a commitment to quality and professionalism. Throughout Madam Walker's professional career, she worked hard to erase the implication that African American hair care manufacturers were unprofessional and exploitive people, who cared more about making quick money than creating a quality product and customer satisfaction. She wanted to build long-lasting relationships with the women who purchased her products and with those who sold her products. Consequently,

if Madam Walker brought women into her company as agents, they had to possess the same type of commitment to professionalism and customer satisfaction that she had. Third, Madam Walker knew that the better trained her agents were, the more likely they would be able to establish repeat customers and build a career for themselves as agents for Madam Walker. Agent success and customer satisfaction were the objectives of her business growth. The success of the agents ensured that Madam Walker's manufacturing business would be successful and continue its substantial growth.

Other reasons that Madam Walker emphasized quality, professionalism and customer satisfaction through her adult vocational program were to position her products and manufacturing company in a class above her competition. Madam Walker realized that, for her product to be generally accepted, she needed to have similar, consistent education facilities in each area where her products sold. As a result, Madam Walker opened branches of Lelia College in Indianapolis, New York City, Chicago, and other industrial cities. By 1918, there were many branches of Lelia College of Beauty Care. In a letter to Freeman Briley Ransom, an attorney Madam Walker befriends and hires in Indianapolis (discussed in Chapter 5), Madam Walker disagrees with a suggestion to change the name of her branches of beauty colleges to reflect the cities in which the colleges operated. In other words, it was suggested that Madam Walker name her Indianapolis school "Indianapolis College of Beauty Care" as opposed to "Lelia College of Beauty Care at Indianapolis." Madam Walker wrote:

> April 25, 1918
>
> I do not quite agree with you there, as in every section of the country you will find a Moler College or a Burnhan College and they are known by

> that name every where. I think it [the name *Lelia College*] lends dignity. (10)

Madam Walker apparently had good instincts, because the small college she began in Pittsburgh soon grew into a many-branched, many-city college that served thousands and thousands of African American women.

The Madam C.J. Walker System: the Text of Economic Change

Madam Walker designed her curriculum around "a detailed beautician's manual, planned by her" (*Freeman* "The Negro Woman in Business" 1). From the manual, and from instructor directions, the students of Lelia College learned the "Walker Beauty System—proper methods of shampooing and treating the scalp, correct ways to wave and crimp the hair, and proper ways to give facials and manicures" (1). The curriculum urged students to imitate Madam Walker: if they practiced business the way Madam Walker did, then it followed that students at Lelia College would become successful, as well. Madam Walker wanted her graduates to acquire knowledge and training that should ensure their immediate success. She felt that the better they learned, the faster they could earn satisfactory amounts of money. Madam Walker further reasoned that, the sooner her students earned money, the sooner they would be purchasing Madam Walker products that they, in turn, would sell. Part of Madam Walker's training used the standard practices and scientific principles as white cosmetology schools, but she sometimes modified the practices described in such schools in order to adapt them for African American hair and skin. She effectively, Freeman says, incorporated white cosmetology practices with her own innovative and proven techniques (1).

Madam Walker's Hair Culturist and beauty-business curriculum quickly became the model for African American beauty and hair care. Lelia College's curriculum was as innovative and creative as Madam Walker herself. It was an interactive combination of the science of cosmetology and hands-on vocational training. A'Lelia and Madam C.J. Walker presented the science of cosmetology via lectures, questions and discussion. Their scientific lectures covered the proper care of hair, scalp, skin and nails. Those classes served as prerequisites to classes about business management and ownership so that Lelia College students would be prepared to face the exciting and unpredictable world of entrepreneurship.

In business management and marketing classes at Lelia College, students learned record-keeping, marketing and sales techniques, general shop keeping and business etiquette. Madam Walker modeled the types of attitudes and behaviors that she wanted her hair culturists to embrace. One of the few archival records of Madam Walker's curriculum, with "Circa 1915" handwritten on it, is summarized below:

> 1. Keep yourself clean as well as your parlor and rooms in which you do your work. 2. Keep waste basket in your parlor and sweep up hair and matched [sic]. 3. Cleanse and sterilize comb and sponge after each customer. 4. Ten cents worth of oxide of zinc in a little bag will keep away odors from the body. 5. Keep hair and teeth clean. 6. See that your fingernails are kept clean, as this is a mark of refinement. 7. See that your hair always looks well. In order to interest others you must first make the impression by keeping your hair in first class condition. 8. Do not use two

combs. 9. Don't use pullers because they damage the hair. 10. Do not be narrow and selfish. 11. Always keep plenty of stock on hand. (Box 7).

Part of the curriculum design mandated that students spend their afternoons in the beauty and hair-care laboratory—a spot that mirrored Madam Walker's posh beauty and hair-care salon but without the posh. The working space had hair-washing sinks and hair dryers—all of the equipment, instruments and appliances that might be found in a regular salon. The combination of business management, marketing curriculum, hair care and beauty treatment training, and hands-on practice reflected Madam Walker's own self-taught, pragmatic and innovative manufacturing and hands-on business practices. At Lelia College, Madam Walker was the primary professor par excellence. Her students watched and learned at the hands of the "master." By studying Madam Walker's every move for washing, conditioning, drying, straightening, pressing, cutting, curling, and styling hair, they learned to become, like her, advanced hair culturists, and from Madam Walker, they also learned the gentle skills of manicures and pedicures. After Madam Walker had completed a task, her students practiced their newly-learned techniques on each other. Each student received ample time to practice all of the various processes, including Madam Walker's special techniques. In the laboratory, students were allowed to make mistakes because, in the lab, they could receive the proper correction and thus prevent any disastrous results once they had their own shops. Madam Walker gave constructive comments during students' hands-on working sessions. Students understood that, in order to represent Madam Walker in the community, they were expected to master all of the skills that she deemed necessary. A photograph in the Appendix depicts Madam Walker lecturing (Figure 4.4).

Madam Walker, a perfectionist since her early days baking ash cakes and later as a laundress, expected and even demanded that her hair culturists become perfectionists, as well. A student had to demonstrate competencies, reliability and excellence before she could graduate from Lelia College of Beauty Culture. According to A'Lelia Bundles:

> Before Lelia College students could graduate they had to demonstrate proficiency in the total care of their patron's hair, scalp, and skin. They spent many hours learning anatomy and how to clean profitable beauty shops before they were taught to cut and style hair. (Bundles *Madam C.J. Walker: Black Businesswoman 1867-1919* [an unpublished paper in the Indianapolis Archives] 1)

After mastering all facets of running both the practical, hands-on and the business management aspects of the Lelia College curriculum, Madam Walker's students would finally receive a diploma like the one in the Appendix (Figure 4.5).

Once the Pittsburgh center, including the manufacturing plant, salon, and Lelia College campus, was up and running under the leadership of A'Lelia, Madam Walker did what she liked to do best: she hit the road. Fanning out from Pittsburgh to market her products and her college, she took stock of other potential locations for her salons, schools and manufacturing plants. One of her sales trips took her to the middle of the nation: Indianapolis, Indiana, an exciting new city that would become an oasis for Madam Walker and her company.

CHAPTER 5

Building a Manufacturing Empire

In 1910, after deciding to fan out and find ways to make her business grow even more, Madam Walker took a business trip from Pittsburgh to the heart of the Midwest, to the city sometimes called the "Crossroads of America." It was Indianapolis, Indiana. When Madam Walker arrived in Indianapolis, she immediately sensed something different about Indianapolis. She smelled and felt it in the air. Actually, she did not smell it, and that was the difference. The air in Indianapolis, unlike the air in Pittsburgh, was not rank or laden with sulfur. It was cool, dry, and crisp, similar to Denver. On the surface, Indianapolis seemed like an average city. Unlike other Midwestern cities, Indianapolis did not have a large industrial factory base. It was neither the richest nor the largest city that she had visited. It did not have the greatest skyline. Yet, she sensed that Indianapolis was special. She did not feel the racial tensions that were prevalent in every city and town that she had visited previously. Madam Walker was mesmerized by the absence of racial tensions in the city. More than anything else, this was what made Indianapolis different and very attractive to Madam Walker.

She visited around the black business district between Indiana Avenue and North West Street and was very impressed with what she learned. African American women worked as teachers, nurses, social workers, secretaries, domestics, and washerwomen. Indianapolis' black women also worked among whites in nondomestic environments—a situation that surprised Madam Walker.

Indianapolis' African American Entrepreneurial Spirit

One evening while in Indianapolis, Madam Walker dined with two African American business leaders and their wives. One of the men, George L. Knox, was slightly older than Madam Walker and had been born into slavery. After the Civil War, Knox had found his way to Indianapolis where he had boot-strapped his way up from a barber's apprentice to the ownership of a ten-head barber shop in one of Indianapolis' leading white hotels. According to Madam Walker biographer A'Lelia Bundles, "Knox used his access to wealthy white customers to advance himself economically and politically. By the late 1880's, he had become the city's leading black businessman and the state's most powerful black Republican" (Bundles 44). Knox would become a good friend and advocate.

At this time, Knox was the publisher of the highly influential African American newspaper, the *Freeman*. Madam Walker instantly liked Knox because he was a lot like she was. He was ambitious and had a strong commitment to hard work and self-improvement. He was very creative and refused to settle for second or third best. He had a vision of a better life and this vision guided his work.

Another dinner companion for that night was leading business man from Indianapolis, H. L. Sanders. Indianapolis was the national headquarters of Sander's company. According to biographer Bundles, "Sanders, his wife, and his 25 employees were producing uniforms and work clothes for hospital aids, hotel workers, janitors, and domestic employees across the nation" (44).

Probably influenced by these two prominent gentlemen, Madam Walker was very impressed with the caliber of African American business leadership in Indianapolis. A

major reason for the success of African American businesses in Indianapolis was the abundance of African American professionals. Indianapolis pulsated with young, gifted black professionals. This became Indianapolis' second selling point to Madam Walker. Indianapolis had a vital infrastructure and a solid network of competent African American professionals. The plethora of such professionals rivaled any big city that Madam Walker had visited. This network and infrastructure provided high caliber business services to Indianapolis' growing African American business community. The infrastructure of professional services included attorneys, accountants, architects, building contractors, bookkeepers, and secretaries. Madam Walker was very impressed. These types of professionals were crucial to the growth of any business. Such professionals and the services they provided had the potential to transform small businesses into medium-sized businesses. These highly skilled professionals and the services that they provided could also help to grow medium-sized businesses into national businesses.

One of the first African American professionals that Madam Walker met in Indianapolis was Robert L. Brokenburr, a twenty-four-year-old attorney and graduate of Howard University Law School whose advice Madam Walker sought. Madam Walker was so impressed with Brokenburr that she placed him on retainer to conduct her legal affairs. One of the first things that Brokenburr did as her attorney was to file the Madam C.J. Walker Manufacturing Company**'**s papers of incorporation.

Freeman Briley Ransom, another attorney who was, in fact, Brokenburr's law partner, was another talented African American professional who had migrated to Indianapolis. Ransom was a graduate of Columbia Law School. Madam Walker quickly

observed that Ransom had strong business management skills. He was the type of solid, level-headed, and honest man that she could trust with the day-to-day operations of her business, so she hired him to do that. His level-headedness and honesty were characteristics as important to Madam Walker as were his business and legal skills. A photograph of Ransom is included in the Appendix (Figure 5.1).

Freeman Briley Ransom, an attorney Madam Walker met, was a graduate of Columbia Law School, and another talented African American professional who had migrated to Indianapolis. Ransom's strong business management skills were apparent to Madam Walker. He seemed like a solid, level-headed, honest man that she could trust with day-to-day operations of her business, so she hired him. His level-headedness and honesty was as important to Madam Walker as were his business acumen and legal skills.

The look, the feel, and the pleasant racial atmosphere of Indianapolis attracted Madam Walker. Indianapolis had everything that Madam Walker wanted in a city. She wanted to associate with black people who were entrepreneurs and professionals. She wanted to learn from African Americans who had local, regional, and national businesses. Perhaps because she had begun to realize that her business could be moving nationwide, she wanted to associate with blacks who had national influence.

Uprooting and Transplanting

Although Madam Walker had lived in Pittsburgh for only two years, she decided to move her headquarters to Indianapolis after only one visit. Her plan, however, was to disrupt her business as little as possible. Lelia College would remain in Pittsburgh under the management of A'Lelia. The Pittsburgh manufacturing and mail order facility would

continue until a new plant could be constructed in Indianapolis. The transition from Pittsburgh to Indianapolis turned out to be an easy one.

In order to further her plans to become a nationally successful businesswoman, Madam Walker realized that she needed to mix and mingle with the highly successful African Americans in this crossroads city. To enable Madam Walker to mingle with the black Who's Who in Indianapolis, she needed a decent home in which she could entertain guests.

In 1910, Madam Walker was forty-three years of age and had been working hard since the young age of five. She was now at a point where she could enjoy some of the fruits of her hard labor. She wanted a fine home and, because of her financial success, money was not an obstacle. Consequently, Madam Walker made a hefty financial investment in a residence. She purchased and remodeled a fine home in one of Indianapolis' upscale, thriving, black neighborhoods.

This home was very different from the shanty-style slave shack that she had grown up in as a child and different from her slightly upgraded home with Moses. It was different from the ghetto's boarding houses in St. Louis, and different from her Denver and Pittsburgh residences. This was the first adult residence that Madam Walker was proud to call home. In 1912, Knox wrote a feature story about Madam Walker's new home: "The outside appearance is that of a home of a well-to-do white family. The interior is where it excels, with its excellent hardwood floors and splendid halls that suggest those of mansions" (Knox 3). In the article, ironically, Madam Walker attributed her exquisite taste to people for whom she had worked earlier in life: she said, "I owe it to the white people with whom I formerly lived" (1). Next, Knox described the other

properties that Madam Walker owned in Indianapolis: “She values her home at $10,000. This does not include a building in the rear containing her hair dressing departments and laboratory. The garage is here, also. She values these at $2,000” (1). Finally, Madam Walker had a place that she was proud to call home. Madam Walker’s Indianapolis home may be viewed in the Appendix (Figure 5.2).

Madam Walker and Indianapolis were a perfect fit. She became an admired lady and socialite. Her Sunday cultural afternoons showcased the most talented African American poets and classical entertainers in the nation. When there was an African American classical artist in Indianapolis, more than likely, that artist was a guest in Madam Walker’s home. Often, individual artists gave private recitals in Madam Walker’s home. These artists included diva opera stars, concert pianists, and harpists (Knox 1).

Within a few months, an invitation to Madam Walker’s home was coveted by all of Indianapolis. Madam Walker wanted to set roots down and wanted to make strong ties to the community. She did. So far, Indianapolis was where everything had fallen into place. Only one thing stood between Madam Walker and her continued social and business success in Indianapolis: Madam Walker had a secret that could destroy her reputation.

Hiding the Secret

The secret Madam Walker needed to keep from the strong leaders of her new community was the fact that she had no formal education. Most of her literacy skills were a combination of functional literacy and basic survival instincts that she had acquired along the way of life. She had developed these skills when she lived in Mississippi and in St. Louis. She probably acquired most of the remainder of her literacy skills attained to

that point from A'Lelia, who had attended public schools in East St. Louis and had gone on to attend and graduate from Knoxville College in Knoxville, Tennessee. Despite her desire to improve her literacy skills, Madam Walker had not found the time to regularly attend night school. However, the time to rectify her literacy situation was now imperative. Madam Walker wanted to do it for her business, but more importantly, she wanted to do it for herself. The internal pressure to improve her literacy skills had increased when Madam Walker opened Lelia College two years before. Now, she could not put it off any longer.

She discreetly inquired about the services of a private tutor and received the name of a woman, Alice Kelly. Kelly was a former school teacher from Kentucky and the perfect person for the job. Madam Walker hired Kelly to work as her private tutor and trusted her to keep her secret of a lack of formal education confidential. Madam Walker also trusted Kelly to keep their sessions a secret. These private sessions took place after Madam Walker had put in a full day's work. Madam Walker, motivated by her need to fit in with her chosen collection of friends and by her own drive for perfection, was a good student. Madam Walker's handwriting was the first learning skill that showed vast improvement.

The improvement in Madam Walker's handwriting was so obvious that her bank stopped payment on several checks that she had endorsed. The bank officials thought that the signatures were forged. Although most people would be upset if a bank had stopped payment on legitimate checks, Madam Walker was actually proud to demonstrate that her signature had dramatically improved. The bank graciously accepted a new account authorization and signature card from Madam Walker. Alice Kelly became the key and

the means to Madam Walker's becoming as educated as most of her peers undoubtedly expected her to be:

> The more successful Walker became, the more she wanted to improve her communications skills. Acutely aware of her own lack of formal education, she sought the cultured Kelly's advice on social etiquette, penmanship, public speaking, letter writing, and literature. (Bundles 46-47)

Madam Walker**'**s thirst for learning overflowed within her spirit. At last she had the opportunity to become the learned woman that she had always dreamt of becoming. Madam Walker realized that because of the lack of educational opportunities for proper mental training in her early youth, she was at a disadvantage. She determined to educate herself. She read everything in sight, including the Bible, which she calls her main guide. She employed a tutor after business hours into the wee hours in the morning. She took courses in commercial business. (Knox Newspaper fragment [date unknown] *Madam C.J. Walker Archival Collection* Box 9, Folder 2)

Madam Walker became proficient in reading within a very short time. In fact, she wanted to read more than what Kelly assigned to her. Madam Walker supplemented her tutorial sessions with a self-directed liberal arts reading program. She also wanted to discuss politics from the perspective of a well-versed and learned person, so she had to be well-read. She wanted to be able to read and discuss the great classics of literature. She purchased and read biographies about the presidents of the United States, African American history books, and many classical works. By August 25, 1914, Madam Walker had created a library within her home. A document in the Archival Collection in

Indianapolis shows a portion of her library. This section of her library inventory included the following books:

> *The Quest of the Silver Fleece. The House behind the Cedars. Hazel. The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man. The Marrow of Tradition. A Narrative of the Negro. Race Adjustment. Half a Man. Mind of Primitive Man. The African Abroad* (2 vols.) (*Archival Collection*).

Madam Walker was very proud of her educational progress. She received a certificate, which may be viewed in the Appendix, from a national organization that promoted adult continuing education within the African American community (Figure 5.3).

Madam C.J. Walker had seen the possible limits to her future success unless she changed her own educational status quo. With Alice Kelly's help and her own personal drive and ambition, she quickly overcame the fact that she had never been in a formal classroom as a student in her whole life. She could now read, write, and converse with the best-educated people in the country.

Lifting Up the Up-Lifters

Once Madam Walker was more comfortable with her literacy and communication skills, she wanted to increase her presence and influence among African American leaders on the national level. The more money she made and the more she entertained, the more she was pursued by influential African Americans from across the country. Her guests included Mary Church Terrell, Mary Talbert, Mary McLoud Bethune, and Ida B. Wells-Barnett. These women were leading civil rights advocates and women**'**s rights proponents. Ida B. Wells-Barnett was a nationally recognized anti-lynching advocate and

a newspaper publisher. Mary Talbert and Mary Church Terrell helped organize the National Association of Colored Women which sponsored many social and educational reforms. Terrell fought tirelessly for women's suffrage, women's rights, and civil rights. Mary McLoud Bethune founded a girls' training school and also the Bethune Institute in Florida. These leaders were among the Who's Who of African American political, social, and economic policy makers. They were social change activists. While they were guests in her home, Madam Walker pampered them. She fed them lavish dinners and entertained them with elaborate social gatherings on their behalf. This special attention gave these leaders a forum and an opportunity to present reports on the status of African Americans across the country. Often, she passed the hat and raised money on behalf of her honored guests' special projects. These quasi-political-social events also demonstrated the immense respect that Madam Walker and the African American community of Indianapolis had for these national leaders. Madam Walker wanted to up-lift the men and women who had dedicated their lives to up-lifting the African American race.

Even though Madam Walker was among the very privileged and elite of Indianapolis and of the nation, she remained gracious and humble. She was always respectful of persons who had less than she. Madam Walker was truly a gentle lady. This was most evident in her interactions with her staff, especially her house staff. She employed maids, cooks, and a chauffeur and always upheld their dignity. Madam Walker always encouraged her house staff to share the ideas and insights that they had heard discussed in Madam Walker's home. Another archival document states: "When the distinguished educators and leaders of her race visited Mrs. Walker's home she never failed to send for her servants and introduced [sic] them to her company" (Box 1).

Maybe Madam Walker was sensitive to including her house staff because she had been excluded from similar conversations when she had worked as a cook and as a maid in the homes of wealthy white folks. Madam Walker knew from her own experience that neither a person's job nor his or her job title equated to that person's ability or potential to impact his or her community.

Madam Walker wanted to show the African American business community how deeply she was setting her roots in Indianapolis. She financed and oversaw the construction of a state-of-the-art, assembly-line manufacturing plant and lavish administrative offices. Madam Walker purchased a piece of property valued at $10,000 (Knox 1). She took great pride in this purchase. Later, she proudly proclaimed her accomplishment to fellow African American business men and women at the conference coordinated by Booker T. Washington: "I have built my own factory on my own ground, 38 x 208 feet" (Davis 154). Madam Walker wanted her business to take the next step. She wanted to emerge from a medium-sized, regional business into a national and even into an international business.

The Inner Circle

Once the manufacturing plant and the administrative office facility were under construction, the next step was staffing. Madam Walker saw business potential in her wonderful tutor Alice Kelly and offered her a job. At first, Madam Walker intended that Kelly would work as a secretary. However, the more Madam Walker got to know Kelly, the more Madam Walker realized that Kelly had business management potential. After the plant opened, Madam Walker quickly moved Kelly from personal tutor to another very important position. Kelly became the forewoman of the Madam C.J. Walker

Manufacturing Company. As the company grew and progressed, Kelly's role and responsibilities increased, and she handled the pressure very well. Madam Walker expressed her satisfaction and pride in how Kelly responded to the growing demands of her job. Kelly progressed so impressively, in fact that on March 25, 1916, Madam Walker gave Ransom permission to hire an assistant for Kelly when the volume of chemical processing increased, as shown in the following excerpt from one of the many archival letters:

> I am glad to know that Alice [Kelly] feels that she can do the work. It is alright [sic] if you [hire] someone to help her. She really needs a man to do the stirring after she has mixed up the ingredients that is really where the hard work comes in and of course the lifting. (Box 1, Folder 2)

Kelly's job was crucial to the success of the three product lines, so she had to be precise and consistent. Kelly also supervised the packaging and the shipping departments.

Madam Walker's moving Kelly to the position of forewoman in the manufacturing plant left a void in the office. Therefore, Madam Walker hired two women, Maria Overstreet and Lucy Flint, to fill the void. Overstreet was the office secretary and Flint the bookkeeper for the company. The office setting was state-of-the-art with the most modern equipment and office supplies: typewriters, carbon paper, and telephones. Ransom, the business manager, also became Madam Walker's advisor and confidant. Madam Walker intended to travel extensively. Therefore, she needed the services of a private secretary on the road with her. Violet Reynolds became Madam Walker's personal assistant and private secretary. Now, Madam Walker had everyone in place in order to be able to broaden her horizons beyond borders that young Sarah

Breedlove had never heard of let alone considered reaching. Piece by piece, brick, by brick, Madam Walker had built a sturdy foundation for her amazing company.

The Madam C.J. Walker Cosmetics Empire

Finally, in 1911, Madam Walker had all aspects for running a successful national and international company in place. She had a top-notch staff and a state-of-the-art cosmetics manufacturing plant. Her manufacturing plant was centrally located in the middle of the country, within six hundred circumference miles of eighty percent of the African American female population in the United States. Not only was Madam Walker and her staff ready, but African American women across the country were also ready for the change that would soon result: Madam Walker would become a recognized leader and a national entrepreneurial force.

Only ten years earlier, very few African American women had pressed and curled their hair, but now most did. The times were changing, and Madam Walker noted these changing attitudes. She read the signs of the times. In an early interview in *The Recorder*, a local, African American, Indianapolis newspaper, Madam Walker spoke candidly about how African American women were perceived and her vision for African American women. While the quote is a long one from a newspaper article, Madam Walker's words need to be read (and heard) *in toto*:

> I want the great masses of my people to take a greater pride in their personal appearance. A few days ago a noted white speaker in addressing an audience of Colored women in one of the Southern states, admonished them to improve their personal appearances and this is exactly what I am preaching all of the time and I dare say that in the next ten years it will be

> a rare thing to see a kinky head of hair and it will not be straight either. Humanity is fundamentally the same every where. We all like beautiful hair, men and women of all lands. A rich healthy head of hair is a sort of a triumphal setting for whatever other physical charms we may possess. The hair skillfully arranged makes comely an attractive face otherwise plain and homely. There is therefore, no over estimating the value of a rich and abundant and growing hair. With this innate human desire for beautiful hair, a desire shared by all races, without regard to race or color, it is naturally following that one would want to improve the complexion and the condition of the face and hands and Madam Walker proves her foresight in entering this market. (Fragment *The Recorder,* Box 1, Folder 10)

The time, the stage, the social context, were ripe. African American women were changing their personal attitudes towards beauty. Increasingly, they had the disposable income to back up their changes in attitude. Madam Walker set her sights upon increasing the numbers of agents that sold her products.

In 1911, the *Freeman* newspaper reported that Madam Walker had 950 agents and reported that her business was incorporated and its stock valued at over $10,000. The newspaper also stated that she had a business income in excess of $1,000 per month (*Freeman* 1). In 1911, such a business income was remarkable for any African American. Additionally, it was unbelievable that an African American *woman* earned this amount of money.

The Plan for Recruiting New Agents

Madam Walker's quest for building her empire was directly related to her ability to reach masses of African American women. Through her thoughtful attention to the public relations aspects of her business, gradually, Madam Walker became known to more and more African Americans. With her increased visibility, Madam Walker attained prominence, prestige, and power. This name recognition was not an accident: it was part of Madam Walker's business plan. Madam Walker wanted to become the undisputed leader in the field of African American beauty and hair care. Madam Walker knew that in order to accomplish that goal, she had to be constantly in front of the public. She did this primarily through advertisements in African American newspapers. This twentieth-century, hot concept was part of a carefully orchestrated plan that helped Madam Walker to become a household name within African American homes. Madam Walker created a series of advertisements in African American newspapers that reflected her personality and her business. She advertised in nearly every community that had an African American newspaper. This included New York, Pittsburgh, Baltimore, Montgomery, Des Moines, Chicago, Kansas City, Los Angeles and many more cities. African American newspapers were popular, reliable, and trustworthy mediums to reach thousands of African American readers per week.

Madam Walker's advertisements paid off. The results were nearly instantaneous. By 1912, Madam Walker quickly increased the number of agents to over one thousand. Then it was two thousand. Soon after that, it was up to three and then to four thousand. The growth of her agents was directly related to her advertising campaigns in African American newspapers across the country.

Madam Walker's use of African American newspapers opened a flood gate of new and enthusiastic women who wanted to work for her. The advertisements featured descriptions of her products' wonderful effects.

Madam Walker's advertisements also featured testimonials from satisfied customers and from satisfied agents. One advertisement spoke about an agent who credited Madam Walker with a major change in the agent's life. This advertisement, quoted in Knox's article, was a swatch of inspiration from one rags-to-riches story: "She [Madam Walker] has made it possible for many Colored women to abandon the wash-tub for more pleasant and profitable occupation (*Freeman* 1).

Madam Walker used testimonials from pleased customers and incorporated testimonials from successful agents, a plus for her and her consumers. No other African American hair care or beauty care manufacturer advertised in a similar manner. Her advertisements captured the spirit, the heart, the soul and the imagination of African American women. This was the exact reaction and response that Madam Walker wanted to have in the lives of her agents, a response brought about by targeted advertisements.

By 1912, there was no denial, and there was very little doubt that Madam Walker's cosmetics company was a national company. It was also a national source of pride for African Americans. Madam Walker's success captured the attention of African Americans. An *Indianapolis News* article of 1915 shows the attention was riveting: this included the eyes of a very prominent someone who had previously been hostile to her and to her business:

> In speaking of Mrs. Walker a few years ago at a meeting of the Business Men's League, Booker T. Washington referred to her as the most unusual

> business woman of the colored race. He said her success was due to two causes, she believed in her work and [she] believed in advertising. (Archival fragment with “Indianapolis News” handwritten. Box 1, Folder 8)

By 1918, Madam Walker and her agents represented the largest economic development movement of African American women that the nation had ever experienced. Thus, the Madam C.J. Walker Manufacturing Company became an empire of African American women. An amazing group of former maids, field hands, factory girls, school teachers, nurses, and of course, washerwomen, helped build their own economic-development “vehicle,” in their own small kitchen shops with Madam Walker in the driver’s seat. Madam Walker’s comprehensive and sweeping advertising campaign helped to continue the success of all of her enterprises. Since there were many African American newspapers at the time, the advertisements placed reaped significant rewards. The well-placed ads generated the response of hundreds of business inquiries. Recruiting no longer meant that Madam Walker would have to personally knock on every door she could find.

To complement and facilitate their already effective recruitment process and the work of the traveling agents, Madam Walker began to enlist others in the recruitment of agents. She engaged ministers, businessmen and others in her efforts to increase the ranks of agents. The following is a fragment of an archival letter, with no clear date, from Madam Walker to Rev. J. W. Hurst, Stevens Baptist Church, Kansas City:

> [I] will say that for every person you can induce to take up the course at $25.00, I will donate to the church $10.00 of that $25.00 and will send the

> person their out fit and instruction by mail. That the [they] may begin work immediately, on receipt of $5.00. (Box 1, Folder 8)

Once Madam Walker began to solicit agents through other sources, persons from across the country began to offer their expertise in recruiting agents. In this letter to Madam Walker from H. S. Murphy, Montgomery, Alabama, Colored Enterprises, December 5, 1918, he informed Madam Walker of potential growth in Montgomery. Murphy said, “Many colored women are grasping for agencies for products such as yours and just now the hair business is having as [sic] almost abnormal boom in and around this city” (Box 1, Folder 8). Murphy also stated that Montgomery was a thriving area that had large clusters of African American women. The larger groups included those at Camp Sheridan and Taylor Aviation Field and Repair Shop. In a letter to Madam Walker from H. S. Murphy, Montgomery, Alabama, Colored Enterprises, December 5, 1918, he wrote:

> The efforts of the colored ladies of this section to beautify themselves is unprecedented. The opportunity to do this is assured to them by unprecedented earning which cannot end with the coming of peace. Indeed they are more likely to increase. (Box 1, Folder 8)

He further stated that unskilled laborers made from $3.50 to $5.00 a day and skilled laborers made from $5.00 to $15.00 a day.

By January of 1918, Madam Walker wrote Ransom and presented a plan by which she would increase the numbers of agents from 20,000 to 50,000 by the year 1920. Again, advertising became a key component. On February 18, 1918, she wrote Ransom from Des Moines, Iowa about her idea:

> I think it would be a splendid thing to get all the Colored papers in which we advertise interested in this campaign. I thought by offering them $500.00 for the paper who interested the largest number of people in the work and we could change the add [sic] to read something like that and everyone who is anxious to make money would take advantage of this splendid opportunity and help make this the greatest Negro enterprise in the world (Box 1, Folder 8).

Madam Walker's enthusiasm was infectious. She wanted and demanded that the agents be one hundred percent Walker Manufacturing ambassadors. Quality products demanded quality and classy representatives in the field. Madam Walker stressed professionalism and truthfulness in portraying the benefits of her products. A short portion of a letter makes her expectations of her agents very clear: "All agents are expected to teach, treat, sell goods, organized [sic] clubs, and give lectures except Mrs. Robinson if she accepts" (Box 1, Folder 8).

As the number of agents continued to grow, Madam Walker began to toss around the idea of gathering her agents into a national organization. In April of 1916, she began formulating these ideas (see letter page 136) and later developed what may have been the first owner-initiated union.

Lifting My Sisters As I Climb

There was one major city that Madam Walker didn't have on her recruitment manifest: St. Louis. Madam Walker saved St. Louis until she was the undisputed leader of manufacturing African American hair care products. When Madam Walker decided to initiate business trips to St. Louis, she traveled to St. Louis with a special mission.

Madam Walker didn't seek the elite or the well-to-do African American society. She did not want to rub her success or her wealth in the faces of black St. Louis. Madam Walker did not choose to drive through the most elegant neighborhoods. She went instead to her old neighborhood, to the boarding houses and to the shanties; to the back yards and to the winding allies that were littered with wash tub stands. Madam Walker went to the processing plants and the industrial factories. She stood on the outside of industrial factory gates. She looked like a politician seeking the new voting power of black men. Although she did not "dress down" for her St. Louis campaign, she was not there to "show off" her fine clothing or her automobile. These items were simply icons or tools: symbols and metaphors that she was successful. She went to the factories to encourage the women, to show them that there was another way to work for a living, another way to support a family. She went to underline the fact that there was Madam Walker's way, and it was a proven success.

Madam Walker saw each African American woman she encountered in her old, poverty-ridden neighborhoods as individual sisters within one family. They were daughters of the Deep South's dust, daughters of the cotton fields and of the oppression that had driven them from the South. She felt empathy towards them and she was attracted to them.

When Sarah Breedlove Davis left St. Louis, she had vowed never to forget the Colored face of poverty and the black, feminine face of desperation. Madam Walker knew the life of hard, back-breaking work as a washerwoman. No matter how bad it got, however, she always felt blessed and very fortunate not to be a factory worker. Nevertheless, it was with the women who worked in the hot, sweaty, factories that she

felt a deep sense of solidarity, a sense of empathy, and a sense of responsibility to help in any way that she could assist them. Madam Walker took off her white gloves and reached out to them. In turn, their twisted and mangled hands reached out for respect. She shook the torn, the bloody, and the oil-stained hands. When she touched their hands, she hoped that some of her fulfilled dreams would pass through her touch, her smile, and her compassion and would remain with them.

She called these women the "factory girls." She did not want them to give up and to resign themselves to the harshness of life. She respected them. More importantly, she wanted to inspire these women with her successful life. She prayed that her success would take root in them and that they would be uplifted and inspired. Even if the factory girls were not interested in a cosmetics career, Madam Walker wanted to visit with them. She wanted to bring a smile to their lives. She wanted to give them an expression of the dignity that she believed they were due. Madam Walker made a concerted effort to recruit them to become agents for her company. Madam Walker believed that her life of success over adversity should serve as a light of encouragement to African American women.

When Madam Walker returned to St. Louis in the spring of 1918, she gave a series of lectures about her company and the value of women starting their own businesses. During one of those lectures, Mary Brownright was in the audience. She listened intently to Madam Walker's words. After the lecture, she wrote Madam Walker with the following request:

March 6, 1918

I am one of the meeting-factory girls that was out Tuesday night to your speaking. I won't [want] to ask you a favor. I hope it is not asking to [sic] much.

Will you please give me one of your books as I failed to get one at the factory? I have a boy and a girl that I would like to read to them. My girl was out but my boy [is] attending night school. I won't [want] him to read about you and what a wonderful success you have made. I did not get the card that were [was] given to the [Meat] Meet-factory girls Tuesday. At the church you said they never came. I am one of the Funston Meat Factory Girls. I room at 2329 Chestnut St. Mrs. Mary Brownright. (Box 1, Folder 7).

That same day, Madam Walker wrote to Ransom and described her experience of meeting and speaking with the factory girls:

March 6, 1918

I was out yesterday half the day making the different factories talking to the girls. They are mostly crude Southerner girls and they need so much encouragement. They are to be my guest[s] tonight at the Central Baptist Church at my expense. (Box 1, Folder 9)

Additionally, Madam Walker informed Ransom that she had made a contribution to the Young Women's Christian Association, YWCA, on the behalf of the factory girls. The funds were for an ice cream social, or a similar type of event that was to be held for the factory girls. Madam Walker felt that the factory girls needed something special and

directed that these activities be available to the factory girls as long as the funds lasted. Her generous gesture was affirmed in the following letter:

> March 19, 1918
>
> Your check for fifty dollars came to the Wheatley Branch thru Mrs. Jessie Robinson. You cannot imagine how much this donation will mead [sic] to the Factory Girls. Our first party, so to speak, will be April 2. We have planned morning pictures, singing and games for them. Afterwards ice cream and cake will be served. I know God will bless you even more than he has already for helping us this time.
>
> Yours truly,
>
> Dorothy C. Guinn (Box 1, Folder 9).

It is very probable that Madam Walker remembered her tough years in St. Louis as a washerwoman and thought that a delicious treat might give similarly suffering women a needed break in their routine and possibly a glimpse of possibility on their horizons.

Madam Walker never forgot her hard years. She never forgot the pain of poverty and destitution. As warm and as compassionate as Madam Walker was to the factory girls, however, she was the opposite with a certain clique in Chicago. Apparently, Madam Walker never forgot being snubbed by the African Americans who were the so-called elite of Chicago. Madam Walker urged Ransom to press ahead and to open a school and parlor in Chicago.

March 11, 1918

> I want to open now because I think this is the time. You should have seen all of the dicity [sedity] who didn't notice the Washer Woman, [they were] falling on their faces to her and every one wanted to entertain one [me] but I did not except [accept] one social call. I was so busy looking [after] business and [looking for] the poor factory girls. (Box 1, Folder 9)

In reserving her visits to St. Louis until much later in her recruiting, uplifting campaign, Madam Walker was not slighting the women of that city. She apparently wanted them to feel and respond to her as a fully successful woman who had pulled herself from the very same conditions in which they lived and worked. She continued from there to even wider horizons.

Madam Walker had set her sights upon more than the United States. The archives present a persistent and deliberate plan to expand the growth and reach of the company all through and then outside of the United States.

In one letter to Ransom, Madam Walker told him that she was preparing to learn Spanish and that she had several agents who needed Spanish texts and materials: "Please send me some Spanish books. I have a Porte Rican [sic] here who is taking the trade. She is going back home to open a parlor and would like to take some literature with her" (Box 1, Folder 8). She wrote Ransom again on March 22, 1919 about the international trade:

> I am writing to suggest that we use for the domestic trade the same instruction for the foreign trade" (Box 1, Folder 8) In a letter from Madam Walker to Ransom, dated Feb 18, 1918 from Des Moines, Iowa],

she wrote the following. “I am herewith enclosing you a card and I wish you would write to this gentleman in regards to taking up advertisement in Sweden. He called on me while in Des Moines and I told him I would have the matter looked after. (Box 1, Folder 8)

Ransom apparently looked after this matter and several other matters regarding the international trade of the business. In the following letter, dated simply “February 11, 1919,” he addresses several international trade issues:

> In regards to the man who wished to do an export business, we are developing an export business along well planned lines, creating a demand, establishing agencies, with proper collection lines, and I would suggest that you do not disturb this system at this time. This [is] being built up at considerable expense to you and Mr. Davila is a high price man, but the trade is growing wonderfully…There is no need of consigning goods to New York, when we are consigning direct to the jobber and customer over seas saving you all this middle man’s commission. We ship by way of New York, and by way of Key West. (Box 1, Folder 8*)*

As is evident, Ransom appears to have given Madam Walker good, solid advice as the horizons expanded for her business. In a later letter addressed to Madam Walker, Ransom expresses his concerns regarding trademark infringement. Following is an excerpt from a letter Ransom wrote on Feb. 20, 1919:

> I find that there is danger of people infringing on your rights in Cuba, West Indies, and other foreign countries unless your trade mark is duly

> registered in such countries. You, of course, have been doing business in a small way in these places for a long time, but now that you are going to do it on a larger scale I was under the impression that your trademark must be duly registered in all the countries that you expect to do business in and for that reason I took the matter up with the patent attorney at Washington. (Box 1, Folder 8)

Ransom, a good attorney, good friend, and loyal employee, seems to have always been on the alert for any infringement on Madam Walker's good reputation or rights. Ransom and Madam Walker corresponded on many different issues regarding the business off shore. He did not hesitate to make suggestions on even seemingly trivial concerns. Soon after Ransom wrote the two letters above, he suggested to Madam Walker that due to shipping costs it might be wise to use a smaller hot comb priced at $2.00 each for their international sales. They were both vitally interested in the process of selling the company's products and services.

The rapid expansion of Madam Walker's business overseas presented challenges concerning how her agents would receive cosmetology education, hands-on laboratory training, continued professional development, and knowledge about new products and processes. How could she maintain quality and professionalism among such a vast and ever-expanding network of women? Madam Walker faced another dilemma. It was impractical to demand that every new agent attend Lelia College for training. It was unrealistic to think that every potential beauty parlor owner would travel to Pittsburgh or one of the branch locations of Lelia College to become a certified agent.

Madam Walker began to address this challenge by returning to her early business practice of traveling fanatically from town to town selling products, recruiting and training agents. She personally instructed and trained each new agent. When she returned to the area, she touched base with the agent and brought the agent up to date with any new products or processes. Quickly, however, Madam Walker knew that her one-on-one contacts could not continue. She realized that she could not personally educate and train all of her new agents. However, as usual, when faced with a problem, Madam Walker came up with a good solution. The solution was to train special agents and dispersed them to follow up with her new and old recruits. These special agents would travel across the country and maintain contact with and continue the educational development of her agents. She would call these special agents traveling agents. She wanted her traveling agents to fill the role of adult educator and provide continued education to agents in many different cities and rural communities. She wanted to build and strengthen exclusive networks that competitors could not penetrate and to create a network to introduce new products and services. One potential sales agent wrote Madam Walker with the following request: “Say Madam Walker, how would you like to give me employment as one of your traveling agents, I am sure I could be of much service to you. There is not one that knows the work better than I” (Box 1, Folder 8).

This agent had apparently heard about Madam Walker’s latest and most innovative way in which she provided continuous education and training for her massive numbers of agents across the country, the Caribbean and parts of South America. Madam Walker believed that she needed a method or system to ensure the success of the cosmetologists and agents. She hoped that her traveling agents would accomplish this.

The traveling agents would monitor quality and enhance the delivery of products and or services.

Madam Walker's idea of engaging traveling agents may have grown from another of her ideas, shared with Ransom, where the probable forerunner of the traveling agents is discussed in the following letter from Madam Walker to Ransom:

> June 3, 1916
>
> In reference to Mrs. Haley, I quite agree with you about her doing the work treating the scalp especially in places where she finds no live agents but I do think she would teach agents where ever she goes. I do not [It does not] matter how many agents are in the town. Don't you think I could designate her as a National Representative as I know of her ability as a lecturer? (Box 1, Folder 8)

The National Representative position also mirrored Madam Walker's constant practice to recruit agents to continue the growth of the company. The role of the traveling agent included a variety of things that Madam Walker outlines in the next letter. In a letter from Madam Walker to Ransom, she unfolded her vision of providing professional development and continued education through traveling-teacher/agents:

> ca April 17, 1916
>
> I am thinking that it would be a good idea to put such women as Miss Lynch to treat, teach, and organize, deliver lectures on the Negro Woman in Business, and show these pictures. I talked with Miss Lynch in Salisbury, and she is very anxious to take up the work. I thought to give her $125. per month and let her pay her own expenses, and after the first if

> she has sent in sufficient business to warrant it to give her an increase. Of course Mrs. Simms is only experimenting she is not the woman Miss Lynch is. I would like you to fix a contract which would apply to such agents as Miss Lynch and give them some dignified name other than agent and submit it to me at your earliest convenience providing you think my proposition [proposition] a good one. (Box 1, Folder 8)

Madam Walker recruited and trained traveling agents to do direct sales to agents, conduct product education, and to provide continued professional development to agents. In a letter from Madam Walker to Ransom, she outlined a portion of the financial incentive for the traveling agents:

> April 10, 1916
>
> Please send Mrs. Lynch Sims at Chicago twenty five dollars. She is going to start on the road as a traveling agent. I will send her a contract from here. (Box 1, Folder 8)

An additional letter regarding the same traveling agent gave Ransom further instruction regarding the agent's commission:

> Jan. 18, 1919
>
> [Give Miss Lynch] $5.00 commission on each agent made. The commission will be an incentive to make her [put] every ounce of her energy to the work. (Box 1, Folder 8)

The enormous growth of the company becomes a clearer concept when noting how the sheer numbers of agents began to grow and grow, as illustrated by an untitled fragment of a newspaper in a folder in Box 1 of the *Madam C.J. Walker Archival*

Collection, a box which holds materials that generally seem to deal with the promotion of Madam Walker's business: "She has 950 agents…and three traveling agents. Her business is incorporated with a capital stock of $10,000, with an income of $1,000 per month and Madam Walker as president" (Box 1, Folder 8).

Another way to chart the growth of Madam Walker's company is to examine the geographic territory of the traveling agents. Madam Walker gave the following update to Ransom on January 10, 1918:

> [I have an] agent going to the islands and on the coast of South Carolina and Georgia. There are hundreds of thousands of Negroes there and many with money and the majority of them are very ignorant. Then [they] need someone to go in there and brighten them up a bit. (Box 1, Folder 8*)*

In another letter dated September 10, 1918 to a Mrs. Burnett, a traveling agent, Ransom gave Mrs. Burnett an itinerary for the coming business year:

> I am mapping out your work for this year, I want you to bear in mind that I expect you to thoroughly canvass Virginia, North and South Carolina. There are more Negroes and more money there than in all other states combined. There are some in lands along the coast of North Carolina that I am especially anxious for you to make. (Box 1, Folder 8)

As the numbers of agents increased steadily, Madam Walker found it necessary to increase the numbers of traveling agents. However, she would not allow any leeway on the *quality* of agents who would represent her. Even though there was a great need for traveling agents, Madam Walker insisted upon dedication, energy, and quality deliverance. Consequently, she found it necessary to have a trial period for the new

traveling agents before she made a commitment to them. In a letter dated June 3, 1916 she wrote Ransom the following report:

> Dear Mr. Ransom:
>
> …I think I have one more in Pennsylvania who I am anxious to take up the work as I know of her ability but I will make her the same as Miss Lynch…I am taking all of these peoples on trial and if they don't make good I will not have to keep them. I think they all do their best as I am depending absolutely on their ability. You are to pay them semi-monthly. (Box 1, Folder 8).

Madam Walker had very high standards and refused to tolerate persons who did not have the same intense work ethic that she displayed. While Madam Walker was resting in Hot Springs, Arkansas, on December 15, 1916, she wrote a letter to Ransom in which she expressed her disapproval concerning one traveling agent that Madam Walker felt had not fulfilled the contractual arrangement and the job description:

> I cannot pay her to stay in Atlanta she has to go on the road and make agents. The fact that she is selling goods in Atlanta does not mean anything to me. She is an agent herself and I presume she is supplying the agents where I have already made. (Box 1, Folder 8).

Madam Walker continued her instructions to Ransom in another letter in which she tried to increase the number of traveling agents:

> Did I give you the name of Mrs. Holmes of Atlanta GA.? If not I wish that you would write to Mrs. Harris of the same city and get her address. She is

> to take Alabama. Mrs. Haley is not limited to any particular state. (Box 1, Folder 8*)*

The increased need for *traveling* agents (to help with continued education) directly corresponded to the steady increase in the number of *regular* agents, called, simply, agents. The role of *traveling* agents expanded to include recruitment of agents as well as continued education and professional development for established agents. Madam Walker continued to take a primary role in increasing the numbers as is shown in the following undated letter:

> Dear Mrs. Robinson, I am writing to ask if you would like to interest yourself in getting agents for me. If you get 10 or more I will teach they for $15 down and the BAL [balance] by July 1____ [sic]. You [sic] to have $10 out of the $15 for your trouble and if they make good in St. Louis I will return 20 percent of every $1.00 they spend with me for goods up to the first of Dec. (Box 1, Folder 8)

Madam Walker's traveling agents became her quality assurance and expansion solution. Her traveling agents were not limited to the United States. She needed to have some that would travel to wherever she had agents. Consequently, some of her traveling agents needed to be ready to travel to South America. In another letter excerpt from Madam Walker to Ransom, dated May 3, 1918, Madam Walker says:

> I received both letters and in reply I will say that I took the matter up with Mrs. Robinson about the South American trip and she says she will be ready to go on the 15th of September. Miss Thompson will accompany her. (Box 1 Folder 8)

Madam Walker was so convinced that she should explore markets outside the United States that she personally made several trips to the Caribbean and South America. Her first trip was in 1913. Madam Walker did not limit foreign travel with herself as the only company representative, either. In fact, Madam Walker's daughter, A'Lelia, was on a business trip to South America, in May of 1919, when Madam Walker died.

By 1918, Madam Walker had recruited thousands of African American women to sell her products. On Dec. 20, 1918, she wrote Ransom and urged him to update the number of agents. "You mention the 20,000 agents as a number we have been using for some time, tho' [sic] it has increased considerably. Consequently suggest you raise it accordingly" (Box 1 Folder 14). The ranks of Madam Walker's agents doubled, tripled, quadrupled, and more. Its profits multiplied in a similar manner.

Gradually, there developed rivalries among the African American manufacturers of hair and beauty products. Madam Walker created a family-type atmosphere with the women who became her agents. She demanded loyalty and one agent wrote her concerning an incident:

> [I] gave the speech of my life...I was Walker's soul, mind, and body, and I would as soon my head be severed from my body, than let any person enter my room to speak [an] ill word against the Walker's either mother or daughter. That the
>
> Mother and Daughter had made it possible for thousands of women to give up the wash tub, the cook kitchen, and the scrub work and drudgery that was the only way for them to make a living and set them up as ladies as a profession on easy street to make an honest living. (Box 1 Folder 6)

Madam Walker, through her unique application of innovative adult education concepts of initial and continued education, developed an incomparable force of confident, accomplished, loyal agents capable of bettering their own lives, their families' lives, their communities' lives, and they were able to help her expand her company to help even more people. Her help for her agents moved from initial contact to being part of an adult vocational system, to professional career, to vast economic and societal improvement.

Now that Madam Walker had created an empire of African American working women, she was faced with another challenge. Could she direct these women into becoming a catalyst for change within their local communities? How could she do this and what type of organization and structure would best suit an army of nearly twenty thousand women to help improve their communities? As ranks of agents and trained cosmetologists swelled across the country, Madam Walker realized that she needed a method or system to ensure the success of the cosmetologists and agents. Madam Walker needed a system in which she could maintain contact with the Lelia College graduate. Madam Walker had several reasons for this. She wanted to monitor quality; enhance the delivery of products, and/or services; build and strengthen exclusive networks that competitors could not penetrate; initiate and sustain a local and national philanthropic and social change organization; and create a network to introduce new products and services.

The most popular methods of instruction for training and presenting the Madam Walker System were the hands-on demonstration and the lecture. The *Madam Walker Archival Collection* holds several photographs of Madam Walker working in a salon with the cosmetologists and the manicurists. Madam Walker traveled across the country and

internationally not only to sell products and recruit agents, but to provide the agents and cosmetologists with hands-on training from the creator of the products and services. Manuals, workbooks, other texts and learning materials were developed for the beauty college's curriculum.

Madam Walker and her staff constantly sought methods and ways to improve and refine the learning processes. Madam Walker was also consumed by creating new and innovative methods to enhance the continued learning and professional development of the agents and cosmetologists. In a handwritten letter dated January 23, 1917, Ransom advised Mrs. A. C. Burnett in Muskogee, Oklahoma, how to utilize the photographic slide presentation provided by the company. He suggested that she include a slide of one of the Madam Walker night course graduates who was very successful in the business. Other slides included: a photo of Madam Walker's home in Indianapolis, students at Tuskegee Institute, Lelia's elaborate beauty parlor in New York City, Lelia's car, key staff, Miss Flint, Miss Kelly, Miss Overton and Miss Lawson, women managers, a photograph of the home Madam Walker gave to her sister-in-law, businesses of some of the agents, the old factory, an agent's home, one of Madam Walker's cars, her electric car, and a photograph of the chauffeur.

The slide show had several purposes. First, it was designed to give the audience a sense of the magnitude of Madam Walker's company and that it was not a fly-by-night business. Second, it was intended to serve as a recruiting tool for women interested in starting in their own hair culture business or women who were interested in becoming sales agents.

From the beginning, Madam Walker wanted to create an organization that offered fellowship as well as skills to the women who entered the profession. This is reflected in Madam Walker's respect of her agents and her desire to portray the company as a family. In a letter from Madam Walker to Ransom while she was in Jackson, Mississippi on a recruiting trip she instructed the following:

> October 30, 1916
>
> In those circulars I wish you would use the words "our" and "we" instead of "I" and "me." (Box 1, Letter 8)

Unfortunately, the archives do not indicate which international locations were opened. The archives do not indicate how many women graduated from the international programs or how many women graduated from the various programs in the United States. It is unfortunate that the Madam Walker Archival Collection does not house her very early teaching materials, such as the manuals and information sheets that she developed.

Madam Walker's high profile advertising and public relations plan placed her company in the spotlight across the country. Her educational programs for adult education of African American women caught the attention of other professionals who were not in the field of beauty culture. These professionals recognized the tremendous influence and reach of Madam Walker's business and thought that they could be of assistance to Madam Walker. One such professional, a Dr. Armistead, approached Ransom, via a letter, to discuss the possibility of working with Madam Walker:

> Feb. 1, 1919
>
> It now occurs to me that if you could get some scientific lectures, well written on the treatment of the scalp to go along with your course, it would

> mean much to your agents and [in] addition to this if it could be arranged that some physician, who is either a specialist of same to give a series of lectures during your convention. It would mean much and would at one place your course on a higher level. (Box 1, Folder 8)

Following the death of Madam Walker in 1919, the leadership of the company transcribed many of the words of instruction and wisdom that Madam Walker used for the instruction of agents and cosmetologists. A hardback copy of a text appeared by 1924. This manual contained a history of Madam Walker's life and work; brief information concerning the company leaders: A'Lelia Walker Robinson; Ransom; Marjorie Joyner, traveling representative and later supervisor of the Madam Walker Beauty Colleges; and Alice Kelley, forelady of the manufacturing plant. The manual discussed methods for cleansing the hair and scalp and included hair growing tips. It included testimonials from customers, agents, and cosmetologists. It contained product listings, safety information, upcoming events, or reports concerning past events, such as the national convention meeting minutes. The text book also included items of interest, such as African American history. Another text book, published in 1924, *The 1924 Year Book and Almanac*, was a concise cosmetology instruction book that included a 1924 weather almanac with forecasts and a calendar. The text described and discussed the benefits of the Madam Walker System and products. The annual convention and the Madam C.J. Walker Clubs were also discussed.

Other texts produced by the Madam Walker Company were the *Madam C.J. Walker's A'Lelia Notes* and the *Walker News*. A'Lelia Notes were a compilation of hints, tips, and ideas that Madam Walker dictated at different times to traveling teaching agents

or to classes of agents and cosmetologists. *The Walker News*, a monthly newsletter, had several purposes. First, it was designed to provide continued education for the agents. In one issue it stated that "you cannot sell it to others unless you are sold to it." Second, it was intended to be an informal way to network the agents and maintain easy access from the agents to the Madam Walker Company. Third, it featured current advice and tips for beauty salon owners. Topics covered in the newsletter included how to become an expert operator, how to maintain harmony among cosmetologists and customers, and hints to manicurists. Fourth, it spotlighted and featured news from agents across the country as well as South America and the Caribbean. The news included tidbits from agents' vacations and announcements, births, children leaving for college, and death announcements of agents. Fifth, it was designed to keep agents abreast of national trends and events that were professional as well as political in nature. An example of professional competitiveness and professional development was presented as food for thought.

> Walker agents everywhere ought to know that their Company Is the only colored company that is preparing its agents for State Board Examinations…There are going to be beauty culture laws of some kind in every State, and the Walker company, leading now as it does in all things, is preparing its agents to meet these when they come. (Box 1, Folder 8)

The role of the Lelia college of Hair Culture leveled off in the market as more competitors promoted their beauty schools and after the Depression and World War II. Even though the influence of Lelia College and the branch beauty schools waned, they

continued to facilitate the professional development of many African American women's entry into the field of cosmetology for more than sixty years.

The Negro Hair, Scalp, and Beauty Culture Alliance of America: Madam Walker's Professional Trade Organization and Change Agency

The professional trade association: The Negro Hair, Scalp, and Beauty Culture Alliance, that Madam Walker had initiated, formed in early September of 1917. The formation was less than one month after Madam Walker had convened the Madam C.J. Walker Hair Culturist Union's First Annual Convention. Madam Walker, at that convention, called for and then helped organize the development of a professional trade association of African American beauty care manufacturers.

Several purposes drove the creation of the professional trade association. First, Madam Walker continued to push the same concept that she had used to create the Madam C.J. Walker Hair Culturist Union: Individuals gain more power when they join together and form an organization through which they jointly pursue their common interests. Second, Madam Walker believed that a professional trade organization enabled the "true" African American beauty products manufacturers to monitor and police their contemporaries in the field. She felt that this mutual oversight would improve the quality of all the members' products and would thus benefit the consumers of African American beauty products. Third, she wanted a forum through which she could push the concept of responsibility and truth in advertising. Fourth, Madam Walker believed that a professional trade association could purchase chemicals and ingredients in bulk quantities and likewise, the members could increase their profit margin. Fifth, the professional trade association could conduct joint advertising campaigns to promote African American

manufacturers. Such advertising campaigns could raise the awareness of African American women in regards to what products were available and could entice the same women into becoming more beauty conscious and to purchase their beauty care products from African American manufacturers. A joint advertising venture had the potential of increasing the sales of all the participating African American manufacturers in the association. The next two purposes indicate that Madam Walker anticipated that the association could become a strong force within the marketplace. One proof of the strong conviction the group held is shown in one of the resolutions that came from the Negro Hair, Scalp, and Beauty Culture Alliance of America's first meeting: "[The Association shall] fix a standard both in price and quality of their products and [thus] protecting the public as well as themselves from the imposters who may by fraud substitute or imitate any member's product" (Box 1 Folder 7).

The worry about imposters apparently ran deep. Since the early days of Madam Walker's successful business growth, she had expressed concern about unscrupulous and unethical manufacturers that she believed copy formulas and sold them under the pretext that they had developed the product. Madam Walker's concern for truth in advertising became one of the first issues that faced the new professional trade association, shown in the wording of one of its resolutions: "It is also the purpose to protect as far as possible all members of the organization who are well known for the merit of their article and whose preparation has already obtained the result claimed to bring its purchaser" (Box 1 Folder 7).

Madam Walker had complained about competitors who made false claims regarding the performance of their products. She marketed her own products with a

money-back guarantee that the product would perform as advertised. For years, she had viewed false advertising as the primary instrument that contributed to the cynical attitude of consumers that had a negative impact on the African American manufacturers of quality products. In a letter to Ransom four months after the founding of the professional trade association, Madam Walker complained about a competitor's fraudulent use of her trade mark and the competitor's misrepresentation of the competitor's length of time in the marketplace:

> January 5, 1918
>
> It is in reference to <u>that</u> [underlining by Madam Walker] Louisville woman. Don't you think if she sells her good under the pretext that it had been on the market for 8 to 10 years that the person to whom she sells it would have a court case against her? I would rather not go in the court if I can keep out of it but I would be willing to back up some one else who would have her arrested for attaining money under false pretences. It seems to me that it could be done, however, I will leave it to your good judgement, but some steps must be taken to prevent her using the name. (Box 1 Folder 7).

Incredibly, the woman mentioned by Madam Walker may have been the wife of her former husband, C.J. Walker. He remarried and started his own business, using the name The C.J. Walker Manufacturing Company. Madam Walker believed that this company name confused consumers and thus hurt her business. She hoped that an association of African American beauty care manufacturers would create a forum by

which these types of issues could be discussed and negotiated among the members of the professional trade association.

Another incident that angered Madam Walker and cast a competitor in a very disparaging light occurred in April of 1918. In a letter to Ransom, Madam Walker angrily lashed out concerning a competitor's underhanded actions. Lelia, Madam Walker's daughter, had a history of alcohol abuse; unfortunately, it was a condition that loosened her tongue. One of Madam Walker's competitors exploited Lelia's dependency on alcohol and obtained Madam Walker's heretofore secret formula. Madam Walker was justifiably outraged and wrote:

> April 15, 1918
>
> I really think that this Saunders Woman ought to be made an example of. My daughter got drunk and gave the formular [sic] to Alice Tisem. (Box 1 Folder 8)

Competitors cannot be guaranteed that others will not stoop to low tricks and even unlawful actions in order to gain profits, but no record exists that shows Madam Walker ever resorting to any questionable practice.

Madam Walker was a consummate professional and a visionary in her field. She wanted to elevate African American beauty care and its manufacturing to a professional level. She believed that common issues within the African American beauty field should be thrashed out professionally through a negotiated and amiable process. Madam Walker knew that her success meant that she had an advantage over the other members and that they would hesitate to be left out of an organization formed by Madam Walker. Another of her insights was that she felt a threat existed from outside of the African American

community. A major concern of Madam Walker and the Negro hair, Scalp, and Beauty Culture Alliance of America was the encroachment and competition posed by white hair-care manufacturers. The entry of white cosmetics manufacturers into the African American market drastically changed the playing field. Madam Walker's concerns were not unfounded. In 1928, eight years after her death, white manufacturers had made significant inroads into the African American beauty-care market. *The Walker News*, the monthly newsletter of the Madam C.J. Walker Manufacturing Company, printed an article concerning white encroachment and competition for the African American beauty care consumer. The article got its information from an article printed in one of the large white newspapers: "Upward of $20,000,000 is spent every year for toilet preparations and beautifiers by the Negro women of America" (*The Walker News* Vol. 1, No. 3).

The information printed in the letter came from a businessman, G. Barrett Moxley, who spoke at the convention of the Wholesale Druggists' Association. He said in his presentation:

> They [African American women in particular] have been told by their educators that a good appearance means a good job…. The beauty consciousness lately aroused among Negro women is responsible for the great sale of beauty preparations among them. (Vol. 1, No. 3)

The article stated that African American women generally purchased expensive beauty care items, especially French perfumes. Madam Walker's company expressed the following concern: "It shows clearly that the white business men in America are turning their attention to the possibilities of making money by selling their beauty preparations to Negroes" (Vol 1, No. 3). The article further predicted that white beauty care

manufacturers would enter the African American beauty care marketplace. Consequently, African American beauty care manufacturers needed to avail themselves of every possible edge and leverage to retain and expand their market share of African American consumers: “If Negro beauty culturists do not cease to sit around and complain and get busy they will lose another great opportunity…. There are white people who are contemplating opening beauty parlors in the Negro neighborhoods for Negro business (Vol. 1, No. 3).”

It is ironic that Madam Walker was the primary reason that white beauty care manufacturers encroached upon the African American beauty care market. Madam Walker was so successful and so extremely well known that she not only commanded the attention of African Americans, but she attracted the curiosity of white beauty care manufacturers who felt that they could manufacture and market products to African Americans and ride Madam Walker’s coattails to profit from her success.

For Madam Walker, the Madam Walker Clubs, the Madam C.J. Walker Hair Culturist Union, and the Negro Hair, Scalp, and Beauty Culture Alliance of America were additional means for her to create teaching moments and opportunities for learning and improving—in the case of the Alliance, her boundaries were not limited even by the confines of her own company. All three groups were another means of educating and training adults—in other words, they were all means of extending opportunities for adult education. Her adult education practice stretched far when she began her Lelia College campuses—but they stretched beyond any known limit when she helped join individuals in order to increase their power and control of their own destinies.

The Madam C.J. Walker Hair Culturist Union: Professional Development and Community Change

As the numbers of agents continued to grow, Madam Walker began to toss around the idea of gathering the agents into a national organization. In an un-dated letter, she wrote Ransom: "What do you think about having a national organization"? (Box 1, Folder 8) Then, again, in April of 1916, Madam Walker wrote Ransom a postscript to one of her letters and began to formulate her ideas:

> P.S. Please [put] in the local papers that I will meet the agents on Monday night May 8th for the purpose of forming them into a club for their protection and to assist in raising funds for the Booker Washington Memorial. I want you also to publish in The Freeman about the forming of the club here and the purpose and that it is my intention to form these clubs all over the country. (Box 1, Folder 8)

She envisioned that the national organization would grow into a powerful union with several goals. First, Madam Walker realized that her growing philanthropic activities could be replicated wherever there were groups of Walker agents. The philanthropies could happen in an organized and systemic fashion if Walker agents across the country united and develop some common national goals and pursued their own local agenda of community philanthropy. Second, she desired that the local Madam Walker Clubs be much more than a social gathering, although she did acknowledge that the social aspect was important. To clarify her ideas, Madam Walker wrote Ransom one week later, April 17, 1916, and continued to flesh out her thoughts concerning the Madam Walker clubs:

> In reference to clubs. I think you misunderstood my meaning. I didn't mean to organize as a Fraternal Society, I meant to organize clubs all over the country, and at some time call a meeting of all the agents and form a National which would be similar to the Women's Federated clubs; only there would be no handling of moneys other than just to pay for literature and the like. Each club will handle its own money. (Box 1, Folder 8)

Madam Walker had constructed another building block in the world of business for the early 1900's. Most business entrepreneurs were afraid of the word "union." Wealthy businesses normally worked hard to "bust" unions, not to facilitate their formation among their workforce. Yet Madam Walker believed that more good could come from uniting her agents than from allowing them to remain disconnected to the philanthropic needs of their local communities and of African Americans nationally.

Madam Walker began to transform her business from a traditional model of leadership and creativity resting with the founder or upper management of the business. Her business encouraged leadership, creativity, and community accountability wherever there were agents. Madam C.J. Walker Hair Culturist Union became the organizing and social-justice arm of Madam Walker's agents from a local and national vantage point. What was in it for Madam Walker and how did she benefit from this union organization? First, Madam Walker agents were visible within their local communities. They were urged to be visible in their communities and to foster Madam Walker's values of education and charity. The high visibility of her agents garnered excellent local publicity for both the agents and the Madam C.J. Walker Manufacturing Company. The positive, high visibility of Madam Walker herself was reproduced on a local level through her

agents. Second, the agents were in positions to take a leadership role within their local communities. Through acts of good service, the agents were viewed as more than individuals selling hair care products or providing cosmetology services. Madam Walker wrote Ransom on April 10, 1916 concerning her work in organizing agents:

> We had a meeting of the agents last week and organized them into a club known as the Madam C.J. Walker Benevolent Association. We organized mainly for the protection of the agents and to keep others from infringing on the prices selling the goods under price. We have also decided to contribute to the Washington Memorial. We had another meeting last night and took in about forty dollars and some cents. Twenty eight dollars and seventy five cents of this amount is for the memorial. There has been one organized in Philadelphia but not for the memorial. I am going to interest them in the memorial fund in fact everywhere throughout the South where I shall go on this trip. (Box 1, Folder 8*)*

Madam Walker, as usual, put much of her own energy and expense into making certain that her individual Benevolent Union organizations were founded, flourishing, and structured for success.

Madam Walker had several national projects that she supported wholeheartedly. One was the Booker T. Washington Memorial Fund and the other was the Frederick Douglass Memorial Fund, mentioned in the letter below. It also becomes clear that another purpose for the clubs was to identify false agents or persons using the name of Madam Walker when they were not legitimate representatives of the company. Madam Walker wanted the agents to monitor their local communities for counterfeit products

which undercut the local agents' profits and had the potential to spoil the good name of Madam Walker's high-quality products. In this letter to Ransom, dated April 17, 1916, she projects her views concerning the clubs:

> Also would like you to form a letter to be sent to all the agents concerning my proposed organization and make a special appeal to them for one dollar each for the Memorial fund. Address them as Dear Friends. Show them the reason why they should contribute. I will show to the world that The Walker Agents are doing something else other than making money for them selves. Don't forget to tell them about the New York Agents who are contributing right along and I don't want my agents to fall behind any body of women in this rally. I organized the Salisbury agents Sunday and the[y] al [sic] pledged their one dollar. (Box 1, Folder 8)

Madam Walker was adamant about the clubs being locally controlled and involved in social change within the local communities. Her concern was so intense that she ordered a new election for a club when she learned about a manipulative agent. In a letter to Ransom she dictated the following instructions:

> Tell Mrs. Day to call a meeting and have a re-election and tell her she cannot make the agents meet at her place unless they want to. If they want to make it a social affair and meet around from place to place, it is their business. (Box 1, Folder 8*)*

The national focus of the Madam C.J. Walker Hair Culturists Union was to become a voice for thousands of voiceless African American people, especially women and children. Economic, political, and basic human rights were issues that Madam

Walker believed her agents could help foster. They could become a part of the leadership that fostered social change within the United States.

Perhaps Madam Walker had another purpose for the creation of local clubs: She was able to garner grass-roots, community-based groups of women who would become a national movement of Madam C.J. Walker Hair Culturist Union. Madam Walker would assume the leadership of nearly twenty thousand African American professional and businesswomen. The focus of the local clubs activities climaxed with the national convention.

Madam Walker issued a call to her agents to attend the first national convention of Madam Walker agents. The call to her agents reflected the serious nature of Madam Walker's intentions. The letter was written on legal paper and it had a very official look to it. She addressed her agents as "My Dear Co-Worker." In order to attend the First Annual Convention of Madam C.J. Walker Hair Culturist Union of the United States, the agents had to be "regular qualified and duly registered on the books of the Company." Madam Walker spoke of the purpose and the need for the convention in several letters to her agents. The purpose and need were outlined in the following letter excerpt:

> 1. To have a National body of workers with a common purpose. 2. To know who the agents of Mme. Walker are. 3. To protect agents against misrepresentation and false statements or fakes and impostors, and last, to have this organization its rules and regulation so strict and perfect until it will be utterly impossible for any one to handle our goods, unless such a one is a regular agent of the company and is a member of the National Organization. (Box 1, Folder 8)

Over 200 Madam Walker agents responded to Madam Walker's call to a national convention. They met in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in August of 1917. The convention had several purposes. First, it gave Madam Walker and her managers the opportunity to meet with many of the agents that they had recruited over the years. Second, the convention served as a vehicle to build a national body of African American women who were vocal concerning race relations and social conditions. The issue of race relations, women's rights, and women's economic power became the focuses and, perhaps, the obsessions of Madam Walker in her later years of her life.

In the January, 1928, issue of *Walker News* there was a discussion about the amount of money African American women spent on beauty products:

> Upward of $20,000,000 is spent every year for toilet preparations and beautifiers by the Negro women of America, it is estimated by G. Barrett Mosley of Indianapolis…They have been told by their educators that a good appearance means a good job. (Box 1, Folder 8)

A decade earlier, Madam Walker had already sensed that African American women composed a lucrative and untapped market for beauty products. She was also concerned that white manufactures of beauty care products would infringe upon the market and drive small African American beauty supply companies out of the market place. To combat this possible white invasion of the African American market place, Madam Walker initiated several strategies. One approach was to organize the African American hair care products manufacturers into an organization—thus giving themselves the clout that one large group would have as opposed to many individuals or small

groups. This “consolidation of clout” will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

Madam Walker’s plan had three components. First, the organization was presented and perceived to be a first-class business operation. Second, Madam Walker was the obvious leader, and she endeared herself to the masses of African American people through her philanthropic work–thus creating a quasi-public-celebrity status. Third, she kept her company in the forefront of the public’s eye through her innovative marketing strategies, constant advertising, and public relations. Consequently, Madam Walker and her company became one of the most talked-about enterprises in the country.

Madam Walker and African American Colleges: Expanding the Reach of Her Vocational System

Perhaps Madam Walker’s most innovative method of providing adult vocational training for African American women involved her endeavors to infuse her hair care system and curriculum into African American institutions of higher learning. Madam Walker networked into her fold many of the struggling African American colleges, institutes, and normal schools by funding her cosmetology programming within these institutions. A chart of Madam Walker’s programs in other colleges may be seen in the Appendix (Figure 5.4).

Madam Walker solicited these institutions by incorporating a visit to the institution while she was recruiting and lecturing in their region. Typically, Madam Walker offered from $500.00 to $10,000.00 to these institutions to provide an exclusive remodeled space for her hair care system to be taught. There were several strings tied to the funding gift. First, the institution had to provide an area that met the specifications of

Madam Walker. These specifications included hair washing sinks, other equipment, a décor of white painted walls and wood work, and room for class instruction. Second, the institution was encouraged to identify an instructor and she was to attend and be certified through Lelia College. In some cases, Madam Walker provided the instructor and paid her salary. Room and board was to be provided by the institution. Madam Walker explains her thoughts on this topic in the following letter:

For some institutions this offer of a supported program of study and a funded position was a very-needed financial boost that enticed them to respond to Madam Walker's proposal. D. W. Smith of Mound Bayou Industrial College responded to Madam Walker on August 25, 1916:

> I have your letter of some time ago offering your art of hair culture and scalp treatment as an industry in our school…This will let you know that I think well of the proposition and we shall be pleased to established such department as early as conditions will justify…Our school is under going some necessary repairs this season but we consider the establishment of this splendid feature in nearest possible future. (Box 1, Folder 8)

Evidence shows that D.W. Smith was not the only college official to express an interest in having Madam Walker's curriculum as part of his or her own institution's. M. W. Dogan, president of Wile University, Marshall, Texas wrote Madam Walker concerning the completion of the new department and new curriculum:

> I wrote you some time ago that we had the parlors all arranged for giving instruction in hair culture in line with the plan outlined when you were here. Will be glad to have the check for $100.00 at you [sic] convenience.

> Miss Blakeney has finished her course of instruction under Mrs. Woods and is prepared to go right ahead with the work. I think great things are in store for us when it comes to the Department of Hair Culture. (Box 1, Folder 8)

In the early decades of the twentieth century, most African American institutions struggled financially. However, for some institutional leaders the potential to expand and improve the institution's curriculum offerings was equally as attractive as the money Madam Walker offered. A. M. Townsend, president of Roger Williams University in Nashville, Tennessee, replied to Madam Walker's offer on January 26, 1917:

> On behalf of the Trustee Board, the Faculty, and student body of Roger Williams University, words fail me to express to you the gratitude that is our for the splendid evidence of your interest in us, and the work we are trying to do here, as manifested in your recent gift to us of Five Hundred dollars toward equipment for the Laboratory. The laboratory has been equipped and is now in use, and in your honor shall bear the name—"The Madame C.J. Walker Laboratory." (Box 1, Folder 8)

The depth of gratitude expressed by the leaders of the small and struggling African American institutions is reflected in a letter from Mary McLeod Bethune. Mrs. Bethune grew to become a close friend of Madam Walker and was a guest at Madam Walker's homes on several occasions. Bethune's letter may be read in the Appendix (Figure 5.5).

Ransom noted in a letter to Madam Walker, dated February 20, 1919 that many of the institutions were struggling financially and questioned if her efforts to expand their curriculums were beneficial to the institutions:

> I know that it would pay you to establish parlors in these schools of course, this is your old idea as to the same…Some of the schools are not doing so well but you at least get your money back and it serves greatly to advertise the goods. (Box 1, Folder 8))

There are no records in the *Madam Walker Archival Collection* that indicate how many women included cosmetology in their curriculum at these African American institutions. The earliest letter from Madam Walker concerning the college curriculum is dated in 1916. However, Ransom, in 1919, referred to her strategy as an "old idea."

CHAPTER 6

Static, Tension, and Friction

World War I ended in 1917. All the Dough Boys came marching home. They returned as heroes. They returned as changed men, especially the African Americans. African American military personnel had seen a different world. African American military personnel had suffered and they had died to keep democracy free in Europe. Now, they wanted to experience democracy in the United States. Whites wanted things to remain as it had been before the war. Tension was thick within the cities and throughout the rural communities. Everyone knew that the rich industrial barons used whichever ethnic group that was on the economic bottom to break the threats of wage protest and union activity. Scabs and union busters kept salaries for all of the ethnic groups low. Yet, these immigrants blamed the victims of racism, African Americans, for the immigrant's economic ills.

The international immigrants dreamt of living in a country rich in opportunity and in a nation that was free from the wars of Europe. The white migrants from the Deep South and Appalachia sought freedom from crop failures, health epidemics, and relief from the dangerous work in the coal mines. The first generation of new immigrants brought with them the baggage of ethnic distrust and ethnic hatred. Socially unprepared to work side by side with African Americans, these new immigrants were also unprepared to see African Americans attain economic gains similar to their own. These fears and hatreds were the sparks of racial violence.

White mob violence against blacks during the second decade of the twentieth century was reminiscent of the hell that followed the collapse of Reconstruction. The fear and the hatred against blacks escalated to a sick fever pitch. It festered and eventually exploded into an evil social epidemic. Between 1914 and 1919, 363 blacks were lynched. This does not include the number of blacks who were killed by other forms of white mob violence, such as shootings and beatings. The *Washington Bee,* an African American newspaper, reported that 2,500 African Americans had been killed within one year. White military service men, who returned from World War I, wanted blacks to know their place in the United States. That place was not a state of civil equality or of economic opportunity. Black military men, who had risked their lives on foreign soil, vowed that they would not return to the United States and live lives of separated inequality. Black soldiers had fought and they had died in order to maintain a political space for democracy. These soldiers were not in any way going to retreat to their pre-war status of inequality and oppression. In Washington, D.C., the nation's capital, gangs of angry white sailors and soldiers attacked blacks randomly for a period of six weeks. The police and military authorities did nothing to curtail this terrorism. The police did not intervene until they received reliable reports that African Americans were purchasing fire arms and were preparing for an all out war. One act of self defense and retaliation initiated the anger of white officials. A frightened, 17 year-old girl shot and killed a white sailor after he broke into her home and he began to randomly beat members of her family. *The New York Age*, a leading African American newspaper ran a day by day, blow by blow account of the terrorist activities of military personnel against innocent African Americans. On July 24, 1919, the published a chilling account of the attacks.

In 1919, there were over 25 major race riots across the nation. These riots were initiated by mobs of angry whites who believed that the economic-pie didn't have enough slices for every ethnic group to partake. Within this social context, Madam Walker, the child of former slaves, emerges as an instrument of social change. After Madam Walker moved to her palatial home in Irvington, New York, she began to experience lingering health problems. Madam Walker's physicians prescribed strict bed rest for her; however, rest was the last thing on Madam Walker's mind. Consequently, she ignored her doctors. Madam Walker continued her hectic pace. She was a national figure and persons with her stature did not rest. However, Madam Walker did make some changes in her life. Madam Walker invited her top sales agents of her hair culturists union for a conference at her New York home, which may be seen in the Appendix (Figure 6.1).

The Madam C.J. Walker Manufacturing Company was on solid ground and it was on a roll. Madam Walker felt confident that Ransom would continue to provide competent leadership and management to the company, but at no time did Madam Walker completely turn over her business to Ransom. Madam Walker believed that she was a role model. She also believed that she had been blessed by God with wealth and, consequently, she had a special mission while she was on earth. Madam Walker began to focus her energy upon the social conditions of African Americans. This was very satisfying to her, but her association with certain individuals and certain organizations was very disconcerting to Ransom. Early in 1918 Ransom became very concerned with the types of organizations and the character of certain individuals that Madam Walker associated and gave financial support. He believed that many of these organizations were fly by night groups that had dubious leadership.

> January 25, 1918
>
> Rev. Jonas are white apostolic as a “nihilist,” fanatic
>
> and a petty grafter who seems to make his livelihood
>
> by appealing to the Negro or some phase of the
>
> Negro problem that will cause them to back him or support him in some
>
> impractical propaganda (Box 1, Folder 14).

Ransom also had critical words about Louis George, an African American advertising executive from New York City. George exhibited considerable influence with Madam Walker. She was impressed by George and his influence had the potential to assume a leadership position within her company. Perhaps, Ransom was jealous. He wrote on January 25, 1919, “Because you are fond of him does not make him fit to manage large affairs or to lead a race” (Box 1, Folder 14). Ransom was careful not to distrust or to dislike all of the leaders and activists that were emerging during this volatile time. He expressed his approval of A. Philip Randolph, a future Pullman union activist. Ransom liked Randolph and Ransom believed that Randolph had a bright future ahead of him. Ransom was very concerned about Madam Walker’s tendency to publicly support organizations and self-proclaimed leaders of these organizations. Ransom had very high standards for organizations and even stronger requirements for the leaders of these organizations. “An organization means much or little in proportion to the ability of its management” (Box 1, Folder 14). Ransom’s concerns may have begun when he received a letter from one of Madam Walker’s personal secretaries. The secretary was brimming with accolades about a speech that Madam Walker made at a meeting.

November 4, 1918

On Sunday afternoon, Madam spoke at a Socialist
meeting and although, I was not there, I feel confident
that Miss Singleton's verdict-that she cleaned up-was hitting the mark.
It was said by others there that it was the best speech she has ever made.
The meeting was held on behalf of the candidacy for Congress of Dr.
Frazier Miller and of course we are all very anxious to see him win the
election. (Box 1, Folder 14)

This was alarming to Ransom. At the end of World War I, the newly formed Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, USSR, frightened the United States. The Red Scare spread across the United States. Communists and socialists were blamed for everything from union activism to secretly infiltrating the United States and preparing for armed rebellion. Consequently, many non-socialist and non-communistic organizations and their leadership were thwarted before they had a democratic chance to affect change. This was the fallout, the fear, and the near paranoia of the Red Scare. After World War I, the United States was assumed the role of an international power. The United States wanted to position itself globally against the social, the political, and the economic threats of communism and socialism. The United States also wanted to hinder, to extinguish and to quash any political or economic tendencies toward the paradigm shifts of socialism and communism within its borders and within the Western hemisphere. As a lawyer, Ransom was professionally compelled to inform, to advise, and to counsel Madam Walker concerning any political actions that might negatively reflect upon his client, Madam Walker. As a business manager, Ransom was compelled to alert Madam Walker, his

employer, about any actions that could result in a financial loss for the company. As a friend, Ransom was scared for Madam Walker's physical safety and her physical and emotional health that might suffer from attending meetings with persons aligned with radicals and radical organizations. Ransom and Madam Walker wrote through these struggles and they clearly laid out their pros and their cons concerning these issues. These letters reflect their respect for each other and the depth of their relationship.

Ransom, many white and many other black political leaders began to see red under every attempt to bring about social justice within the United States. Ransom wanted Madam Walker to know that his perspectives on communism and socialism were not far from the mainstream of political thought. President Roosevelt was admired by many leading African Americans and Ransom sought to use this advantage in his discussion regarding socialism. November 27, 1919

> Under separate cover I am sending you a copy of the December metropolitan and I want you to read the article written by Col. Roosevelt on Socialism found on pages, 5, 6, and 66. After you have red it you will know what my views on Socialism are, because he expressed them exactly. (Box 1, Folder 14)

Ransom believed that one's home was one's castle and he thought that Madam Walker's palatial home, Villa Lewaro, was a shrine to her hard work and a ray of hope for all African Americans. Madam Walker had opened her home to numerous organizations for their strategic planning sessions. Ransom was against this practice of Madam Walker.

January 21, 1919

> One's home is sacred and it should never be made the place for gathering of theorist, propagandists, etc (Box 1, Folder 14).

Ransom's first point of attack was to appeal to Madam Walker's ego, her prominence, and her social stature. He wanted her to appreciate and recognize her special position in African American society. He wanted Madam Walker to become more selective of her association with so-called leaders of the race. Ransom viewed her leadership role as more special and more privileged within the race. He thought that she should be more selective about her association with organizations. It was her uniqueness, Ransom believed, that made her very vulnerable. Her uniqueness was a source of power and he did not want this power to be diminished by having her reputation and image damaged by associating or by participating with radical organizations.

January 29, 1919

> You have become a national and so far as the business world is concerned an international character. In the course of time your race will naturally turn to you for counsel and leadership, provided and I saw provided with emphasis that you have not lessened your influence and have not cheapened yourself by becoming identified with too many people of known intellectual limitations of fanatic ideals who are striving selfish or otherwise to place some kind of propaganda before the public. You must always be watchful lest you be charged with seeking cheap notoriety. We who know you and have learned to love you know that you are not of this

> type or kind by any means, but the world does not know it and will judge you naturally by your acts and associates (Box 1, Folder 14).

Ransom was cautious not to appear too negative and he tried to balance his character attacks with a few favorable words for one of the young civil rights leaders that Madam Walker associated.

> January 25, 1919
>
> And another thing, we have too many organizations. The trouble with the Negro is that he fails to support any one organization, he is always organizing new ones. The N.A.A.C.P. will do the work if supported or some other organization working in harmony with the N.A.A.C.P. (Box 1, Folder 14)

At first, Ransom based his criticism on the need for African Americans to present a united political front by supporting the work of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, NAACP. However, there were other strong reasons for Ransom to urge Madam Walker to be very careful about her visible participation in the movement for civil rights.

CHAPTER 7

‘There, But For the Grace of God, Go I’

As Madam Walker’s company grew, her wealth also grew. Madam Walker’s wealth increased her fame, her prestige, and her recognition within the African American community. Oddly, whites began to take note of the five-foot, four- inch, broad-nosed, colored woman. Whites applauded Madam Walker’s efforts to eliminate what they perceived as the unattractiveness of black women. She was seen as the Negress whose business obliterated kinky, black, hair. They admired her because she was committed to making black women look more like white women. They were mesmerized by her rags to riches story. Whites were intrigued with Madam Walker’s stellar business brilliance. She was the Negress with the Midas touch. Whites were most impressed with her wealth. At the turn of the twentieth century, Americans were obsessed with stories about the nation’s newest millionaires. These new, wealthy, upper class men took pride in displaying their wealth. Instead of paying their exploited workers a just wage, they buffed their image with philanthropic gifts. They created libraries. They built hospitals. They initiated universities, art centers, and museums. However, Madam Walker, true to her nature, was different. Whites and blacks were taken aback by her sincere generosity towards desperately poor African Americans. Madam Walker was in a class of her own when it came to money, especially, to her philanthropic endeavors. Within nine fast years, she had established herself as the leading African American manufacturer in the United States, and perhaps, in the world. During this time, she had amassed an enormous fortune. Yet, this wasn’t enough for her. She had other goals. Madam Walker was

determined to become the nation's leading African American philanthropist. Surprisingly, this was not enough, either. She wanted to mobilize her agents into an economic, political, and social force of African American women. Madam Walker wanted her company and her agents to become recognized nationally as the leader in philanthropic endeavors regarding African Americans. The white male, philanthropist generally made the public announcements. Then they relinquished the administration and the business of philanthropy to their wives. For Madam Walker, her philanthropic work was her work and the work of her agents. Madam Walker took another leadership step forward. She wanted her band of 20,000 plus African American women to share the limelight that she had created.

She wanted her agents to model her philanthropic spirit within their local communities. Madam Walker wanted her agents to model all of the character traits that she believed were essential to building a strong infrastructure within the African American community. She wanted her agents to engage in activities that helped the under privileged and the vulnerable members of the African American race. Madam Walker believed that wealth in the hands of a person of true religious convictions could change their world. She wanted her agents to be as concerned about their local communities as she was concerned about the national status of African Americans. She wanted her agents to see the entire spectrum of the black community, children, women, and older persons as worthy of a decent life. Madam Walker did not want her agents to brush off, to ignore, to feel, or act better than, the poor, the weak, the uneducated, and the marginalized African Americans. Apparently, Madam Walker never forgot what it was like to be poor, very poor. Madam Walker knew what it was like to want for the bare necessities of life

because she had lived in want and need for the first thirty-seven years of her life. Her travels around the country kept her keenly aware of the status of African American men, women, and children. Madam Walker believed that the road to success was paved with opportunities to be generous and with opportunities to advocate on the behalf of those who could not advocate for themselves. The high road to success was also paved with the responsibility to lift others and to carry them along on the road to economic betterment.

It is easy to be skeptical and to think that Madam Walker's wealth made it easy for her to be generous. A cynical person might even think that her philanthropic and her charitable activities were a mirror of white philanthropy without the fan fare. Was philanthropy a part of Madam Walker's public relations plan to increase her name recognition? Perhaps, her philanthropic activities were intended to increase her sense of high regard among African Americans and among whites. This is tempting, but her archival records and African American newspapers present a different portrait. Madam Walker was deeply compassionate. Madam Walker differed from Sarah Breedlove in name, in wealth, and in fame only. Her kindness to strangers grew from her experience of moving to East St. Louis where she was embraced and befriended by the membership of St. Paul A.M.E. Church. Early in her life in East St. Louis, Madam Walker saw that she was not the only single head of a household who was poor. Yet, her destitute poverty opened her heart to others who were in worse financial straits.

The *Freeman* newspaper reported that Madam Walker had once learned of the desperate circumstances of an aged African American man, who was the sole support of his invalid wife and his blind sister. Even though Madam Walker and Lelia were close to drowning in poverty, she reached out with compassion to this man and his family. The

newspaper reported that Madam Walker went throughout her impoverished ghetto and collected pennies, nickels, dimes, quarters, and perhaps, a few half dollar coins and gave these coins to the family.

> She collected $3.60 which she gave to them. She was so pleased with the joy manifest by the giving. She felt it was her duty to do even more for the poor people spoken of. She arranged for a pound party through which means groceries in abundance were given, also a purse of $7.60 (*Freeman* 16).

Madam Walker did not wait until she had an excess of money in order to practice charity and generosity. Nor, did she want her agents to wait until they felt that they were financially secure before they became financially supportive of others. Before Madam Walker's company began to grow by leaps and bounds, she took the initiative in philanthropic leadership in her community. Ransom wrote a summary of Madam Walker's philanthropic activities soon after her arrival in Indianapolis in 1910, a time when she had been in business for five years:

> $50 for Christmas Baskets to the poor of Indianapolis and annual contribution to the Alpha and Orphan House, purchased a wheel chair for a crippled old man, who is eighty five years old, employment of a person who is deaf and dumb, annually giving to the colored orphans home in St. Louis, and purchased milk for sick babies (Box 2 Folder 11).

The first major philanthropic act that gained Madam Walker national attention was her donation of $1,000.00 to the capital building fund for the Indianapolis Colored Young Men's Christian Association. African American and white newspapers raved at

Madam Walker's remarkable generosity. Madam Walker clearly stated her philanthropic responses to the social context within the African American community, "The Young Men's Christian Association is one of the greatest institutions there is," said Mrs. Walker. "I am very glad to help the association, and I am much interested in the work. I certainly hope that the new building, and I think every colored person ought to contribute to the campaign. If the association can save our boys," she added, "our girls will be saved, and that's what I am interested. Someday I would like to see a colored girls' association started." (*Freeman* 1911)

America's Wealthiest Negress

It was philanthropic endeavors like this that fanned the flames of public opinion that Madam Walker was a millionaire. At this time, she was not a millionaire by any standard. When Madam Walker contributed $1,000.00 to the Colored Young Men's Christian Association's capital fund, she was struggling financially. Ransom wrote later that she gave this money while she was drumming her products from town to town, living in rooming houses, fixing customers hair, and doing her own washing late at night. Yet, she made a commitment to the young men's social organization and continued to support it throughout her life. Madam Walker gave $100 annually to the capital building fund for the Colored branch of the Young Men's Christian Association. Ransom encouraged Madam Walker to use her philanthropic agenda to put her in the right circles with the best people of both races. Subsequently, Madam Walker allocated a subscription to the International Young Men's Christian Association. Ransom wrote her a letter supporting her contribution to the organization.

> It keeps you in touch with the very best people of great influence and of international reputation of the other race...Such donations are like bread cast upon the water, they will have far reaching influence that cannot be over estimated (Box 1 Folder 14).

In 1910, $1,000.00 was a very substantial amount of money. Consequently, Madam Walker was crowned the nation's first female, Negro, millionaire. She may not have been the first female, Negro, millionaire. However, she most definitely was the most generous and the most renowned African American of her time.

When Sarah left St. Louis, she did not forget the colored face of poverty and the black, feminine face of desperation. Madam Walker knew the life of hard, back-breaking work as a washer woman. No matter how bad it got, she always felt blessed and very fortunate not to be a factory worker. However, it was with the women who worked in the hot, sweaty, factories that she felt a deep sense of solidarity, a sense of empathy, and a sense of responsibility to help in any way that she could to assist them. She called these women the "factory girls." She didn't want them to give up and to resign themselves to the harshness of life. She respected them. More importantly, she wanted to inspire these women with her successful life. She prayed that her success would take root in them and that they would be uplifted and inspired. Even if the factory girls were not interested in a cosmetics career, Madam Walker wanted to visit with them. She wanted to bring a smile to their lives. She wanted to give them an expression of the dignity that she believed they were due. Madam Walker made a concerted effort to recruit them to become agents for her company. Madam Walker believed that her life of success over adversity should serve as a light of encouragement to African American women.

White newspapers that published articles on the short, colored woman who had made a fortune in the Negro hair care industry, could not write enough stories about stories about her wealth and generosity. They described her as the nation's wealthiest Negress. Madam Walker and Ransom had a private running joke. At times, she was not sure if she wanted people to know that she was a millionaire. She wanted to play it both ways. On January 14, 1918, she wrote Ransom about this issue:

> I guess that you get a bit of pleasure from the comments that are being made about you. I laughed my [heart out] over what they said about me in Chicago. I do not mind if they think I am a millionaire as long as they do not beg me for any more money (Box 1 Folder 8).

Madam Walker's fears became her wonderful dilemma. She was bombarded with solicitation letters from respectable agencies, schools, and businesses. She was constantly bombarded with letters from unknown persons asking her for money. One young man wrote to Madam Walker asking her for $1,000. He said that she was so rich that she would not miss $1,000 if she gave it to him. He added that he would use the money wisely. This was the down side of the notoriety of being promoted as the first African American female millionaire. To Madam Walker's dismay, the barrage of unsolicited letters seeking donations from Madam Walker continued. Madam Walker grew weary of letters from individuals, agencies, schools, and organizations. She gave specific instructions to Ransom and to her office staff. In September and one month later in October of 1916, Madam Walker expressed her frustration with the onslaught of requests from the public. By September 18, 1916, she was at her wits end:

> I am also enclosing some tickets that come from the Y.W.C.A. Ask them please do not bother me with such things, as I think I do enough for all of these organizations without them bothering me. I just gave them fifty dollars, when I was there in May. Tell those girls in the office and Miss Kelly as well, if any body asks for my address to refer them to you...I am sending back these begging letters.
>
> Now Mr. Ransom I do hope you will not send any more. I don't even want to hear about them. (Box 1, Folder 5)

Yet, the more that she played down her wealth, the more recognition she received for being a millionaire. Her fame captured the attention of the white newspapers. This notoriety was unprecedented because the focus was on an African American woman. The public read reports of Madam Walker's generosity like they read the lines of a character in a Shakespearian drama. One of the white newspapers mesmerized by her story was the *St. Louis Post Dispatch*. Madam Walker wrote Ransom, on March 4, 1918 concerning an article in that newspaper:

> I emphasized the fact that I was worth nothing like a million and ask him to state such. I also ask him not to use the word Negress or hair straightener. It seems that I cannot prevent them from saying what they want and neither can I keep them from writing me up as they wire New York and get the information they want as you see in this case. (Box 1, Folder 9)

White newspapers became obsessed with the persona of the exquisitely refined, impeccably dressed, former washerwoman. Madam Walker was hounded and pressed by

white news reporters concerning her financial status. It was as if they could not or they refused to believe what African Americans believed about Madam Walker. By March 6, 1918, she needed to quiz Ransom as to what to say to reporters.

> Please tell me just what I am to say concerning the income. These people insist on calling me a millionaire and not withstanding my protest, the white people insist on writing me up as such. I do want to give them something definite. (Box 1, Folder 9)

From Columbus, Missouri, she asked Ransom for an answer that would not conflict what they reported to the government. Whites were not the only people enthralled with the national obsession of Madam Walker. Ransom attended a church service where Madam Walker was the subject of the sermon. He wrote Madam Walker in mid-December of 1918:

> [Rev] Williams preached on you Sunday, saying that you are the only Colored millionaire in the world. He spoke of others, naming them, who were thought to be with a million but stated that they were not. I am pretty sure that he said all these thing for my benefit, thinking that I would write you telling you what he said and asking for your money. (Box 1, Folder 14)

Despite her hard knocks, being taken advantage of, and her vulnerabilities, Madam Walker did not become cynical. She maintained a heart filled with compassion and empathy. Madam Walker's generosity was motivated by her empathy towards African Americans who were less fortunate than herself. As Madam Walker's fame grew, she attracted a group of followers. They were groupies for whatever reasons. Yet, Madam

Walker always made it clear that she was a rugged individualist. She did not need a following or an entourage to represent her to others. There were, however, a few persons who liked dropping Madam Walker's name in certain circles. They dropped her name in gatherings to gain access for themselves to coveted groups or access to special social occasions. However, thinking that you were a friend of Madam Walker did not assure you that she would support your special interest, agency, or organization. Mrs. Chaplin was such a person. Madam Walker found herself in a sticky spot when a friend asked her to help the Mrs. Chaplin organization. For Madam Walker, everything was business. She turned all situations into business opportunities. Madam Walker turned the situation to her advantage. She used Mrs. Chaplin rather than to allow Mrs. Chaplin to use Madam Walker. This letter demonstrates how she handled the situation in January 10, 1918:

> She [Mrs. Chaplin] has not asked for anything but she put their needs before me. I do not want you to give that fifty dollars for a while yet. I told her I was not able to even pay that now. I want them to feel the need of me. (Box 1, Folder 8)

Madam Walker's financial success continued to grow. By 1916, only eleven years after she developed the Wonderful Hair Grower, it was common knowledge that Madam Walker was a millionaire. However, when Madam Walker thought of being a millionaire, she only considered the sales and profits from her hair preparation business. Most of the public had little knowledge about Madam Walker's true wealth. In addition to Madam Walker's cosmetics empire, she owned stock and she was invested in many companies. Madam Walker owned real estate holdings in many different states. Her property assessments at the time of her death were astonishing. She owned over $800,000.00

worth of property in New York state alone. She owned property across the country, especially in cities where she had established Lelia College branches. She questioned Ransom concerning her business progress. Madam Walker expressed her hope that she would make the million dollars, one year, sales mark in hair care products within six years. Two years later, in Ransom's 1917 annual report of sales, he proudly informed her that her business had accrued record sales. In a letter to Madam Walker on January 6, 1918, he presented a clear picture of her financial state. "Your receipts exceed over a quarter of a million and I have no doubt but that you can easily make it a half million in 1919" (Box 1, Folder 8).

The Madam C.J. Walker Manufacturing Company had sales of $275,937.88 in 1918 and $486,762.08 in 1919 (Box 31, Folder 9). This was $100,000 over the previous year's sales. Madam Walker was rich and successful in every way; yet, she was not satisfied.

Sitting In High Cotton Up North

Madam Walker's wealth did not blind her to her goals. She was very concerned with the economic development of the African American community. Early in her business career, she began to identify African American owned businesses. She wanted to invest in viable businesses in order to infuse and invest monies and expertise. She wrote Ransom early in February 22, 1916, regarding his scheduled trip to Chicago:

> I am glad that you are going to Chicago and hope that you will visit the Royal Life Insurance Company while there give me your opinion of it because I am boosting them everywhere and have written to them. (Box 1, Folder3) \

Madam Walker's support of African American business people was an attribute that she vigorously practiced in all phases of her professional and private life:

> There is yet another remarkable trait of character possessed by Madam Walker that might well be emulated in this. She is not only a woman who merely talks, but who acts equally with her every
> word. Every flat, and apartment house erected by her in Indianapolis or elsewhere, by Madam Walker was done by colored contractors. Her attorney, physician, and business manager are all members of her race. (Box 1, Folder 3)

Madam Walker's practice of promoting and supporting African American businesses was evident in her private life as well. Madam Walker's booming business generated revenues that enabled her to build mini-mansions and her world-renowned palatial home, Villa Lewaro, in Irvington, New York, on the beautiful Hudson River. Villa Lewaro was the talk of the town and the envy of black and white successful businesspersons. Madam Walker selected Vertner W. Tandy, the first licensed African American architect in the Northeast of the United States. He wrote her concerning the early stages of the building process. One letter dated February 14, 1917, illustrates the opulence of Madam Walker's house that was under construction:

> Now the results are these: the highest estimate was $98,800 and the lowest $72,977 for the best work. ...We have had Mr. Miller in the office for the last two days working on reductions, and we will have definite figures for you by the latter part of the week. (Box 1, Folder 10)

Tandy's credentials were outstanding. He was a special student at Cornell University and he completed the four-year course work in architecture within three years (Special student refers to the policy of Cornell University, and other white universities and colleges that allowed African Americans to attend classes and to take examinations for any curriculum. However, they were not awarded a diploma or a degree in their subject area.). His credentials, however, did not protect him from Madam Walker's pension for perfection. Nor did his credentials insolate him from her promise to herself not to allow any man to run over her or to take advantage of her wealth. She wrote Ransom concerning Tandy's liberty with her automobile. Madam Walker dealt with Tandy herself and she did not mind telling Ransom of the run-in with Tandy. On April 24, 1918, she wrote:

> I arrived this morning and found you had given permission to let Tandy use the car to go back and forth to Irvington. I am here now in the office waiting for a car to take me up there. I think he has his nerve to even ask for such a favor. He is being paid for his work and he should manage to get out there some way without using my car. He knew I was in the house this morning and he used the car anyway. You can bet I called him up and balled him out. (Box 1, Folder 14)

Despite the shaky start the Madam Walker and Tandy had, Villa Lewaro was completed and it was revered as the most expensive and beautiful home owned by a colored person.

> Plans for furnishing the house call for a degree of elegance and extravagance that a princess might envy. ...It is in the Italian renaissance style of architecture designed by V. W. Tandy, a negro architect...It is

> fireproof, or structural tile with an outer covering. The visitor enters a marble room whence a marble stairway leads to the floor above. On the first floor are the library and conservatory, a living room, furnished in Italian style, a Louis XV, drawing room with a hand painted ceiling. Adjoining the two drawing rooms is a chamber for an $8,000 organ, which may be played automatically or by hand. Mme. Walker likes music...sounding pipes will carry the strains to different rooms in the house. (*New York Times Magazine*)

Villa Lewaro was completed, and it was Madam Walker's pride and joy. The mansion was a long way from the slave shack in which she was born in Delta, Louisiana. It was different from the love house that she shared with her precious Moses. It was different from the boarding houses of East St. Louis and her one room home in Denver, Colorado. Madam Walker's first home in Indianapolis cost $10,000 and that was a mansion. She had also purchased a home in New York City for $50,000. However, this house on the Hudson, was her dream home. This was the house that she designed. This was the house the she and her agents had built with their hard work. Ransom had begun to think that Madam Walker's accomplishments warranted a novel or some form of recognition. Madam Walker wrote Ransom on April 30, 1918, and she conveyed her thoughts concerning his thoughts.

> I expect to go into that house with as much delight as Mrs. Gould would go in her house and as far as my history is concerned, I will leave that to your judgement. I have always thought [that] the best motto, have it [after] until my death. (Box 1, Folder 10)

Tandy also designed a new headquarters and factory in Indianapolis for Madam Walker's company. The more money and resources that Madam Walker generated and earned, the more she thought of ways to help African Americans develop a strong economic base. The innovative headquarters and factory complex include space for up and coming African American businesses:

> This will include dentist and doctors office space, an assembly hall building, 20 bungalow type houses, Bungalow Park, street lights, and side walks. The construction should be done as the same time as the new factory. You must remember there is not a single modern office for colored physicians in the city. This industrial City or Model City could be easily incorporated into your plans for a Building and Loan Association. These homes could be sold in easy payments and you could easily realize a handsome profit on each at the same [time] be a real benefactress. (Box 1, Folder 8)

Madam Walker did more to incorporate African Americans into her process of wealth. While other capitalists and entrepreneurs built their wealth from the exploitation of their workers and from monopolizing their markets, Madam Walker wanted to include as many persons within her business profits as possible. Remarkably, in 1917, Madam Walker decided to restructure her company's attitude towards its generation of revenues. "Mme. is now going over plans for the placing of her great manufacturing enterprise on an operative basis so that her agents will share in the profits of the same" (Box 12, Folder 2).

This was unprecedented. Madam Walker kept rising and rising, lifting and lifting, and climbing and climbing. The more she helped her people, the more successful she became in business. Her business smarts and her real estate savvy enabled her to become one of the wealthiest self-made women of the early twentieth century. However, she never forgot that education was the primary way to exit the grasp of poverty.

Yet, Madam Walker was never blinded by her wealth and the privileges that she enjoyed because of it. Madam Walker was more committed to the possible impact on civil rights and social change that she could initiate because of her wealth than she was attached to her wealth.

Chapter 8

'I Have Fought the Good Fight, I Have Won the Race'

Madam Walker, her parents and the millions of other hard working African Americans of her time, had a very strong work ethic. They were not afraid of work, nor were they resentful of what they believed they had to do in order to change their status in life. If one wanted to survive, then one had to work hard. However, if one wanted more than survival, then one had to be resourceful, creative and work very hard.

Letters within the archives from Ransom and friends, urged Madam Walker to slow down and become more mindful of her health. In reflecting over Madam Walker's life, as told through the archives and the works of Bundles, Madam Walker demonstrated a restlessness, a wandering or adventurous spirit. The seventeen years that she lived in St. Louis were the longest time that she lived in one location. Once her business began to grow, she was in perpetual motion. She sold products, created products, recruited agents, and she trained agents. Later in her business career, she became involved in philanthropic activity. She spoke to groups of African Americans in the evenings. Then she became a key leader in the political and social change movements, which required many hours of her evenings and weekends. After her death, Ransom wrote a brief historical account of her life. Ransom recalled that Madam Walker was one of the hardest working persons that he had ever known. She had a wellspring of determination and an unlimited supply of commitment to whatever work or project that she was engaged:

> Understand she was struggling then [1910] to get a foundation. At that time she was taking in roomers, cooking for them, manufacturing her own

> preparations in a back room, then doing heads [styling hair] in another room for the rest of the day; she did her washing at night. (Box 1, Folder 14)

Madam Walker was a workaholic. It was almost as if she were a nomad, a woman without a home. She was born in a slave shack. She lived in numerous shanty-ghettoes. She stayed in boarding houses in the early days of her business when she was a drummer based in Denver. She bought a home in Pittsburgh. She moved to Indianapolis. She purchased a house in Indianapolis for $12,000. She bought a brownstone in Harlem, New York. The lower level was for the posh styling salon and beauty college. She purchased a $40,000 home in New York. Then she purchased a $50,000 home; then a $75,000 home; followed by another large investment. Her last home was Villa Lewaro, which cost $250,000. Madam Walker was approached about having a motion picture made about her life and her palatial home, Villa Lewaro. Charles Allman, the flicker-maker, encouraged Madam Walker to seriously consider his offer. He appealed to her ego. He said that she would have the leading role. He said that this movie was exactly what the colored people needed to see in the movie theaters.

> The advantage of having such a picture will be that you can book it at all the race [segregated theaters that only showed black films] at a handsome rate. (Box 1, Folder 10)

Villa Lewaro was Madam Walker's final earthly home. It was also her last significant investment that she made. This letter was one year before her death. A few months after this letter, she informed Ransom not to forget her intention concerning her Irvington home. Madam Walker informed Ransom that after her death, she wanted her

mansion to be deeded to the NAACP, “a cause that will be beneficial to the race and a monument.” (Box 1, Folder 12)

The Final Journey

Apparently, the extensive travel, the damp fall and cold winter took their toll on Madam Walker. For several months, in 1918 and early into 1919, she complained about a cold that she could not overcome. Her doctors prescribe strict bed rest for her. Even though, she wrote to friends that she was about to slow down, her work letters indicated differently. The activity of work, the love of work or perhaps, Madam Walker’s need to work were a part of her character and essential to her ideal of life. From the beginning of her business career, Madam Walker was firmly convinced that she could not rest because her business was entwined with what she believed that God wanted her to do.

During the spring of 1919, Madam Walker traveled to St. Louis. By April 18, 1919, she became seriously ill. Many people brought flowers and offered small tokens of good cheer. When Madam Walker was bed ridden with her illness, she wrote a thank you note to David Jones. He and his choir had gently serenaded Madam Walker while she was seriously ill. In her letter to Ransom, Madam Walker wrote that she had experienced fading in and out of consciousness however, she recalled the beautiful music of Jones’s c choir. In one of her last letters to Ransom, she wrote that “at the time [it] seemed to be, my last earthly journey (Box1, Folder 16). Even though she may have sensed that she was on her final journey, she remained ever gracious. She appreciated all of the acts of kindness that others afforded her.

There is one incident recalled in the archives that may have been a stressful time for Madam Walker near the end of her life. Ironically, this incident occurred while she

was in St. Louis and it was with her arch rival and former employer, Madam Malone. Ill health did not deter groups and organizations from asking Madam Walker for donations and support. A request from an unnamed organization came to Madam Walker. She replied with a contribution. Unknown to Madam Walker, her rival, Madam Malone learned of the amount and she made a higher contribution to the organization. Her rival, Madam Malone, topped Madam Walker's donation. A local African American newspaper reported that the two women were engaged in a charitable bidding war. This infuriated Madam Walker. This was not the kind of philanthropic giving and publicity that Madam Walker wanted to associate. Hastily and angrily, she withdrew her contribution. Soon after this incident, Madam Walker became very ill. However, she was not too ill to not write a very critical letter about Madam Malone's motivation. This was her perception of the incident that she shared with Ransom in a letter dated April, 1919.

> In reference to my pledge to the association, I have no rush to send in my check, for I have been so humiliated to think I have been so grossly misunderstood. I have endeavored thru all my business career to show the public and my race that I have no desire for cheap notoriety, but have done only my Christian duty, as God has enabled me to see it. I have never given a single donation under the guise of a CHALLENGE. Therefore when I saw in the St. Louis [newspaper] a facsimile of the check signed by Mrs. Annie P. T. Malone, under which was inscribed "the check that made history" and which went on to say that Mrs. Malone quickly covered my challenge; I was more surprised and humiliated that I can ever express. A woman who did not have enough Christianity in her heart to

> even inquire concerning, or send up a prayer for a sister who was prostrated during a visit to her home town and was apparently in the throws of death, I would not wish to accept a challenge from me. We are rivals in the business it is true. But to meet is a natural circumstance. We expect and should encourage friendly rivalry. No one can get a monopoly on the world in particular live [life] and if we could I would not want it, for I believe that every being should have a chance. It is a game of the survival of the fittest and if I have outstripped Mrs. Malone, it is due to Him who does all things well...It becomes more and more incredible to me that a woman who stands out as she does, a business genius of our race, should be so narrow of soul and unchristian like. (Box 1, Folder 16)

This was one of Madam Walker's last business letters and it clearly and concisely indicates her philosophy concerning competition and the necessity of successful business persons to support and help those who are less fortunate.

Final Accommodations and Final Thoughts

Madam Walker returned to Irvington, New York, in a private railroad coach. She was accompanied by Dr. W. P. Curtis and Miss M. Antoinette Howard, a registered nurse (*New York Age*). Her private physician awaited her arrival at Villa Lewaro. Ransom had been summoned to her bedside when she first became ill in St. Louis. Others, who felt that they were family, or close friends, gathered at Villa Lewaro and they kept a somber, death-watch.

According to various African American newspapers, during her last days, there was a prayerful vigil-like atmosphere that enveloped the palatial mansion. Lilia was not at her mother's bedside because Leila was on a sales, recruitment and college site development tour in South America during her mother's last days. Despite Lelia's valiant efforts, she did not arrive at Villa Lewaro before Madam Walker's death. Sarah Breedlove McWilliams Walker, most commonly known as, Madam C. J. Walker died May 25, 1919. Several African American newspapers reported that her death occurred early Sunday morning. The day and time of her death may have been very comforting to her surviving family members and friends. This is because many African American Christians of her day believed that Sunday was the Lord's day, a day of rest and the day of victory over death. Madam Walker ended her life in very different circumstances from the living conditions at the beginning of her life. Slightly more than fifty years earlier she was born in a cabin that was home to a family of former slaves. Yet, her deathbed was in a mansion, and she was surrounded by wealth and splendor. She entered into her eternal rest and her eternal reward from a home that reflected her hard work, her faith in God, and her faith in herself. As a young woman, she was a washer-woman, a domestic and a cook for wealthy, white families. They probably took little notice of her life, however, at her death over 20,000 African American women, who were her sales agents, mourned her passing. Untile she was thirty-seven years old, her jobs were menial, however, she gave African American dignity and pride in their experiences of work in a nation that practiced racial and gender restrictions in education and work.

News of Madam Walker's Death

Major African American and white newspapers reported her death. Some of these reports were inaccurate and earlier than her actual death occurred. Yet, little by little, news of her death began to become known to the thousands of African Americans who loved her. One such African American newspaper, *The New York Age,* described her final day.

> For more than a year she has been in ill health. High blood pressure is said to be the cause of her death. Madam made the trip against the advice of her physician (*New York Age*).

The *New York Age* and several other newspapers reported that ureic poisoning, kidney failure, perhaps due to high blood pressure, were the official causes of her death. African American newspapers were not the only newspapers that reported the death of the nation's wealthiest black woman. *The New York Times* obituary headline read, "Wealthiest Negress Dead." Ironic, isn't it. The most outstanding, self-made African American woman in the United States remained a negress in the eyes of *The New York Times*. Black and white newspapers wrote of her creative genius, positive ability to motivate blacks to better themselves, her business empire, Lelia College and, of course, her philanthropic giving.

Madam Walker had conquered her life within her social context. She made the best of whatever life presented her and in doing so, she was able to positively impact the lives of thousands of African American women and their families. Her life shone as a beacon of hope and possibilities for African Americans as well as for whites.

The Legacy

As word of her death spread across the country, the accolades began to pour in as well. Hundreds of letters, telegrams, cards, and good wishes were sent to Lelia and to the company. Persons who admired Madam Walker struggled to find words that conveyed what their hearts felt. They used words and phrases such as “foremost,” “her place cannot be filled,” “unspeakable loss,” “the race suffers,” and “a calamity to the race.”

Her funeral was attended by a who’s who of leading African Americans. Thousands, perhaps millions, mourned for her.

Many remarked that her life was full and that “she had crowded in a few years a century of achievements” (Box 2, Folder 24). A lieutenant in the army commented that “the race will miss the philanthropist, and we her friends will miss the tenderest Mother of all” (Box 2, Folder 24). Madam Walker was eulogized by several distinguished ministers, including A. Clayton Powell, pastor of Abyssinian Baptist Church. Another minister preached the following:

> The world does not need to be told who Mme. C.J. Walker was. She was a tower of strength to those whose cause she espoused...without fear, and reproach...We mourn the taking away of one who was our beloved leader and most illustrative example of our possibilities as a race representative. (Box 2, Folder 35)

Madam Walker was very proud of being called a “race-woman.” One of Madam Walker’s agents shared her thoughts about this also. “She was a lover of her race and to loved ones race is an affinity with God” (Box 2, Folder 25). First Lieutenant George J.

Austin crystallized the powerful influence this woman had on the economic and emotional states of African Americans.

> This is an irreparable loss to our race at this time and I fear there will be not to fill her place for a long time to come if at all. Without doubt she was the great and best representation of Colored women in our era because she made the greatest substantial progress of any Negro man or woman. There is no need for tears at Madam Walker's going for hers was a life full of rigorous life beautiful spirit in service of her fellows. How can one do more or better? Faith in God and in herself. Let her spirit and inspiration make us better men and women. (Box 2, Folder 23)

Roscoe Brice wrote a moving tribute to the importance of Madam Walker's success upon the way that all African Americans are viewed by whites.

> Madam Walker's achievement in business enterprise was, of course, something extraordinaire. It was due to no accident and to no favor, but to her own genius. She realized that to produce something that the multitude demands is to acquire riches...Mme. Walker never forgot her roots, or people. She worked in service to the development and progress of the Negro people in America. She was ever true to her race and to America. (Box 2, Folder 23)

Four months before her death, Madam Walker hosted the ILDP in her Villa Lewaro estate. One of the members who attended the meeting was the Grand Keeper of Records and Seal of the Grand Lodge, Knights of Pythias, W.F. Cozart. He expressed his

feelings about her importance in the life of African Americans, allowing Madam Walker to smell these flowers of gratitude and appreciation before her death.

> I especially wish to express to you my commendation and admiration of your race loyalty, which in my estimation is unsurpassed, by any other member of the race. I regret to say that, as a rule those of our race who has come in possession of wealth, had tried to get away from the race, therefore, never spend their money in a way that would benefit the race, or in a way that it would bring credit to the race. But not so with you, I am deeply impressed with the idea, that your utmost thought is for others. May I quote the following poem and re-dedicate it to your efforts, as a crown for a worthy Queen. (Box 1, Folder 1)

Whites also appreciated the fact that she was a race-woman. G. Barrett Maxley, vice president of Kiefer Drug & Company reflected his thoughts concerning Madam Walker.

> Deepest sympathy in the great loss of you and your people...Madam Walker possessed a remarkable vision and unusual enterprise and energy. The good she has done for her people should serve as an inspiration to others (Box 2, Folder 27).

Edwin Cameron of Cameron Iron and Bronze Works, Inc. wanted to express his sympathy and the importance of Madam Walker's contributions to her race and her influence upon whites.

> I recognize that in the death of Mme. Walker that the people of your race have lost a true and valued friend and I think I can without reservation say

> that a person can hardly perform the wonderful things that Mme. Walker did for the beloved of her own race, without her influence being felt on humanity generally (Box 2, Folder 23).

Others recognized that she was more than a race-woman. John Nail wrote Lelia: "Mme. Walker was the greatest woman that this country has ever produced, so it is a great loss to both you and the country" (Box 2, Folder 28). A cosmetologist in Rhoda Beauty College in Nashville, Tennessee, said that Madam Walker was "one of those persons who transcends the boundaries of race and creed and national origin" Box 2 Folder 32). Mrs. Booker T. Washington wrote that "her life has meant much to our young women" (Box 2 Folder 29). Mrs. Teddy Roosevelt also sent her condolences to Lelia and to the company.

Numerous persons realized that Madam Walker had made her significant accomplishments during a time in which there were very few opportunities for blacks and for women to achieve the basics of life and the fundamentals of democracy. One person wrote Lelia these words of comfort.

> Madam Walker was a living example of that one can accomplish in life against obstacles of prejudice and her life shall ever be a beacon light to which we can always point with pride. In her death you have lost a MOTHER, the race a noble woman and a large hearted philanthropist, and the nation a patriotic and loyal citizen (Box 2. Folder 23).

Perhaps, one of the strongest statements of condolence and encouragement came from her employees. They jointly issued a statement concerning their relationship with Madam Walker:

> The least we can say is that she was just and equitable. We honestly testify that she did not gain her wealth by overworking or underpaying her employees. She did not go about giving large sums of money while employees worked under unfavorable conditions. (Box 3, Folder 3)

This statement from her employees was a powerful testimony of Madam Walker's commitment to social justice and social change. Madam Walker's employees stood in radical contrast to the experience of the majority of workers in the United States during the first twenty years of the twentieth century. Most of the men and women, immigrant and native born, could not utter these words about their employers. This was the first of hundreds of laurels that crowned Madam Walker's lifetime of achievements.

A Life Well-Lived

There was always a mysterious air about Madam Walker. She seemed larger than life. Her accomplishments were equally as mysterious and larger than life also. A few years after her death, the company developed a textbook that was designed to motivate her agents to strive to achieve what Madam Walker had achieved.

> Madam C.J. Walker struggled against adversity, fear and worry, so much every woman's struggle. It is within one's own self to weave the cloth that clothes one's future and make one a success or a failure in proportion to her faith in God and her faith in her own ambitions (*Madam C.J. Walker Manufacturing* 16).

When Madam Walker died in 1919, people began to speculate about how wealthy she was. A news release from her company began to answer some of these questions. It never gave a specific amount, but people got an idea.

> She owned $800,000 of property in New York State. She also owned property in Chicago, Savannah, Los Angeles, and Gary, Indiana. She owned an entire city block in Indianapolis. Her cash sells for 1919 were nearly $500,000 (Box 3 Folder 2 and Box 31 Folder 9).

Madam Walker was as generous in her death as she had been generous when she was alive. Ransom issued a news release shortly after her death listing some of her intentions for her last will and testament.

> $5,000 to the NAACP for a foundation of an Anti-lynching Fund; $1,000 to the Colored Orphan Home; $1,000 to the Old Folks Home, in St. Louis; $2,000 to Tuskegee Institute; $5,000 to Haynes Institute; $5,000 to Daytona Normal Institute; and $2,000 to Mite Mission Society (Box 3, Folder 8).

These are only a few of her generous gifts. Madam Walker also left sizable gifts to her family, friends, and employees.

How a person is remembered depends upon many factors. Madam Walker wanted to be remembered in many different ways. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, she stood against the social context or racism and sexism and created a life of fullness and promise. Sarah Breedlove McWilliams Walker died in a palatial mansion, wore fine gowns and diamonds, yet she never forgot her humble roots. Proudly, she owned property across the nation, yet she was not afraid to generously help those in need. Although she was never formally educated, she believed that education was the key to a better life and a brighter future for the next generation. She was always willing to help those who were less fortunate than herself. Risk taking and creativity were the

corner stones of her rise to fame and fortune. Madam Walker stood for and worked for social justice during a time in which justice seemed only a dream and not an attainable goal. A poem that Madam Walker loved is found in her archives. Perhaps, she liked it because it was a favorite of a man that she admired very much, Frederick Douglass. She referred to this as her motto for her life:

> Lord, help me live from day to day
>
> In such a self-forgetting way,
>
> That even when I kneel to pray,
>
> My prayers shall be for "others" (Box 1, Folder 1).

A Remarkable Woman Forgotten

Madam Walker's accomplishments and contributions have not been studied, recognized and appreciated by many outside of her race, and, sadly, many younger generations of African Americans are unaware of her life. The tragedy of Madam Walker's life is that the important lessons that can be learned for overcoming racism, sexism, economic depression and more are accessible only through obscure academic studies. Sometimes life unfolds in ways that there appears to be an intentional social conspiracy to keep hidden important persons who can continue to make a significant difference in the world long after his or her death. Madam Walker is one of these persons in which other factors complicated and obstructed her access and continued influence among African Americans and to the broader world.

First, her daughter, Lelia, had no desire to continue the work for which her mother had laid such a strong foundation. However, Lelia was very interested and instrumental in supporting and promoting African American writers and artists of the Harlem

Renaissance. Letters in the archives reflect Ransom's struggles with Lelia concerning, what he termed as, her excessive spending, her lack of a desire to work within the company, and her lavish parties.

Second, the company became overextended financially before the Great Depression hit the United States. This severely restricted the company's ability to pay its debt on the massive headquarters in Indianapolis and its ability to stave off new competitors. The Great Depression and subsequently, World War II restricted the growth of most businesses that gained their profits off personal items, such as, hair care products. By the 1950's, white hair care and beauty care manufactures had branched into the African American market in a very robust fashion. As early as 1917, white hair care and beauty care manufacturers had taken note of Madam Walker's business success. Subsequently, they had developed "colored" hair care and beauty care products and they had become engaged in aggressive marketing activities to African American women. After the Great Depression and World War II, African American hair care manufactures had fewer financial resources to invest in advertising and marketing than during the prime time of Madam Walker's business life.

Third, many of the persons whose accomplishments and contributions are known, examined and held as examples for further consideration for successive generations were people who were academics, such as Bethune, Miller, DuBois or Douglass, and they have a written treasury of papers, articles or documents that can be studied and criticized. The outstanding leaders of the African American community who were the focus of scholarly study were associated with the very small number of African American colleges and universities that fostered scholarly research. Others were associated with foundations or

social agencies that benefited from their pursuits. In addition, most of the African American colleges and universities of the first half of the twentieth century were job-training oriented rather than research and philosophy oriented. Even though Madam Walker was not formally educated, she started a college and supported numerous colleges and institutions. She was a personal friend and a financial supporter of many academics and their institutions, but none of them wrote scholarly treatises about Madam Walker's accomplishments or contributions to African American society.

The record of her accomplishments and contributions became the treasury of her business manager, the inner circle of the company's staff, and later a descendant. These devoted persons were the saving graces to preserving her name for future generations.

Unfortunately, as the number of agents and colleges dwindled, Madam Walker was relegated to the status of being appreciated as a folk legend and heroine rather than an innovative economic developer, political activist and social change agent, who was merely laying the groundwork and foundation of a new African American society and systems for living. Consequently, the next phase for Madam Walker's life, after her death, would have been to build upon her foundation and to continue to adjust her principles to emerging African American communities.

Fourth, eventually, the weight that tipped the balance and the saving grace concerning the legacy of Madam Walker was her family, especially Lelia Perry Bundles. Bundles, a descendant of Madam Walker and a journalist, became the storyteller and the one who continued to place Madam Walker before the American mind within the last twenty years.

Bundles' ability to present and reinterpret Madam Walker stimulated the examination of Madam Walker from an adult education perspective. Consequently, this study allows the diverse characteristics of adult learning, individual and community transformation, philanthropy, and political social action to be viewed holistically within the social context of the early twentieth century and through the lens of an African American woman's life.

The frustrating effects of Madam Walker's nearly invisible legacy in history include the following: she is unknown to many African Americans, Latinos, Asians, whites, poor people and those who work for social change among the poor. All Americans can benefit from knowing the depth and breadth of Madam Walker's accomplishments and contributions. Persons who desire to effect economic change and community transformation are unaware of her contributions and accomplishments in this area. Colleges and universities could benefit from her type of innovative hands-on work-force training curriculum infusion, thus broadening their appeal and reach into their communities. Community colleges, colleges and universities could bridge and improve the educational skill levels and competencies of persons with less than post secondary skill competencies. By teaching hands-on, immediate market-ready job preparedness, from a learner-centered worker skills in a learn-and-work environment, persons with low work skills and low incomes could improve their status. These educational institutions could entice and engage a community of persons and their children into a broader relationship with higher education.

For practitioners of adult education, education and social change are uniquely connected. Social change leaders and philanthropists may be unaware of Madam

Walker's positive track record for taking risks and challenging the status quo. Madam Walker's devotion to education, women, children and the elderly sought to connect and strengthen the fragile fabric of society during her lifetime.

For whatever reason, Madam Walker failed to create a following of business leaders who were committed to modeling her work as a successful entrepreneur, philanthropist, and social-change and political activist. After Madam Walker's death, African Americans, especially businesspersons, failed to continue the high-level financial support and philanthropic commitment to social agencies and political change movements. Consequently, later generations had very limited knowledge of the creative potential that had already been demonstrated in Madam Walker's life. Therefore, instead of building upon her legacy, her proven methods and strategies, Madam Walker's hard work and leadership in the area of individual and community transformation, philanthropy as social change and political action as a holistic approach to building a society became dormant. Without Madam Walker's accomplishments and contributions as part of a critical dialogue for social and community improvement, growth in the areas of individual and community transformation was stagnated.

A comprehensive examination and study of Madam Walker's accomplishments and contributions from diverse perspectives and disciplines is needed in order to appreciate and learn from her life. Madam Walker's contributions and accomplishments are needed in other fields of study besides adult education. This includes African American history, feminist history, economic development, and political science. The first step towards a diverse disciplinary examination, study and appreciation of Madam Walker is the Smith Model of Adult Education for Individual and Community

Transformation, which is discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 9

Conclusions: Future Research

Madam Walker made valuable contributions to the study and practice of adult education. However, awareness of her contributions to the field of adult education is sparse. There are several reasons for this. First, Madam Walker was an African American woman who lived from 1867-1919. Few women, African American or white, had the opportunity to design and lead educational programs that affected the lives of thousands of people. Second, adult education, as a field of study, was in its infancy at the turn of the twentieth century (Knowles 102). The study of the field of adult education focused on the institutions and agencies that reflected and promoted the new field of study. Historical adult education research comprises only a small segment of the research agenda of contemporary adult educators. Third, while racial, gender and ethnic histories are encouraged by the field of adult education, this research tends to be examined by persons who represent the racial, gender or ethnicity of the person being studied. However, this is not always the case. Even though numbers of African American academic adult educators have grown within the last quarter of a century, the numbers of African American historical researchers remains small. Fourth, and of great significance, Madam Walker was not formally educated, nor was she associated with an educational agency. Consequently, she did not have a sense of academic preservation and reproduction. Madam Walker was a businessperson who was also an educator of adults through vocational training. Her adult educational directives differed from the proponents of

liberal education. Fifth, Madam Walker was overshadowed by the academically trained African American leaders of her day. These leaders included Mary McLeod Bethune, Mary Church Terrell, Nannie Burroughs, George Washington Carver, Carter Woodson, Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois. All of these great African American leaders and adult educators of her day were writers or educators who were involved in institutions that continued and perpetuated their thoughts. Madam Walker was a businesswoman. Through her business, philanthropic and social change activities, Madam Walker became a prominent adult educator. Business letters were seldom thought of as historical records that could chart the life of an adult educator. Many of Madam Walker's associates believed that she was an outstanding African American leader. However, after Madam Walker's death and the Great Depression, her business managers were primarily concerned with the survival of the company.

Discussion of Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to examine several research questions regarding Madam Walker's life and accomplishments. Those questions were as follows:

1. What accomplishments and contributions of Madam C.J. Walker enhance our understanding of how adults learn?
2. What is the relationship between social context and adult education for the economic empowerment of African American women during the early twentieth century?
3. How has Madam Walker's early twentieth century practice of educating adults contributed to the development of a model of adult education for contemporary times?

Question 1 Discussed

Little historical research exists, especially in the field of adult education that examines the learning accomplishments and possible contributions of African American adult women during the early twentieth century. In fact, the term, adult education, does not appear for scholarly discussion until 1919, the year that Madam Walker died. Nevertheless, Madam Walker's accomplishments and contributions illustrate the grounded reality and presence of the future discipline of adult education's thinking, methods, principles, philosophy and practice. This study of Madam Walker presents a perspective that adds to the understanding of the desire, need, practice and successful accomplishments of educating African American women during the early twentieth century. Archival and other sources used in this study indicate that Madam Walker's accomplishments and contributions greatly enhanced the opportunities and abilities of twenty thousand African American women to learn, specifically, for their economic empowerment, community social change and political activism. She accomplished this in many different ways. Her agents learned via lecturers, in hands-on-laboratories, and through media slide shows and photographs. Lelia College, the traveling agents for professional development, political action, and her philanthropic giving are indications that Madam Walker's accomplishments and contributions enhanced the learning of the agents who worked for her. It was her success as an accomplished business entrepreneur that enabled Madam Walker to establish branch locations of her college across the country, the Caribbean and South America. Her successful growth facilitated the need for continued education and professional development through her traveling agents. This led

to the innovation of conferences and conventions, which expanded the agents training to include community social change action and political activism.

Madam Walker's financial success provided a strong philanthropic posture that established the placement of her curriculum in many African American colleges and universities. There were no archival records that indicated how many women took the college or university class, the mail order course, or the night school course to become an agent or hair culturist. Thus, it becomes a matter of speculation as to the number of women whose lives were improved and enhanced by Madam Walker's learning programs. However, it is documented in the archives that 20,000 agents worked for Madam Walker's company at the time of her death. Other than the correspondences among Ransom, agents and Madam Walker, there was no archival way to determine the social effect, continuity and breadth of Madam Walker's impact upon the social conditions of the communities that she assisted and the communities where her agents were active and initiated projects, such as scholarships and other school supporting works, taking care of the aged and day care for children of working mothers. There is a similar dilemma regarding her philanthropic activity.

Philanthropy was an unchartered river when Madam Walker began to establish herself as the nation's premier African leader in giving. While helping one another was by no means a new concept within the community, Madam Walker demonstrated that one woman's small gift became powerful when it was united with thousands of other women's small gifts. This provided another valuable way in which African American women learned via Madam Walker's accomplishments and contributions.

In the area of political activism, it is equally challenging to determine the long-lasting effects of her valued financial and visible support of various organizations and causes. One organization that remains prominent is the NAACP. As discussed in the study, Madam Walker provided continuous and substantial financial support to the NAACP during its critical infancy and development period. It was the combination of her strong financial support, her articulation of issues in the media and in behind the scenes meetings, her personal and visible presence and her dynamic leadership that set the course for her political activism. Moreover, she believed and loved the work and value of political activism. She knew the social context and put thee lion share of her energy of her final years into political and social activism.

African American women learned how to become politically active within their communities through the urgings of Madam Walker and by watching her work and live as a political person. She was Like a hearty soup on a cold winter's day, Madam Walker combined several vital ingredients to make her political stand against racism and sexism within the United States. This combination included the following: financial support for the anti-lynching action committee of the NAACP, visibility and financial support of the Silent Parade, public gratitude for African American soldiers, vocalization of the inequity of their treatment and the fearless pursuit to attend the Paris Peace Conference to address civil rights in the United States. This demonstrated to African American women the necessity for them to become more active in political activism, nationally and locally. Ironically, or remarkably, Madam Walker's political activism occurred months before women received the right to vote. I am sure that she would have jumped at the

opportunity to vote and organized African American women to quickly and effectively use the newly gained power that Madam Walker never had.

Agents watched, modeled, and learned Madam Walker's ways of reading the world from a social and political perspective. They learned through her insistence upon local charity and philanthropic giving the depth of social ills and the power of collective giving. From the active process of identifying and the extension of self, the learning impact rippled throughout the community, and it began to change or transform communities. While it is important to acknowledge that Madam Walker's accomplishments and contributions provided opportunities for learning and personal improvement for thousands of African American women, it is equally important to recognize that her accomplishments and contributions emerged from a turbulent social context.

Question 2 Discussed

Learning implies change, and adults learn when they want or need to change. Therefore, the social context holds great potential for learning and change. The second question that guided the study asked if there was a relationship between the social context and adult education for the economic empowerment of African American women during the early twentieth century. The simple answer to this question is yes. It can be better explained by examining the social context of Madam Walker's life and her impact upon the economic empowerment of African American women.

When she was born in 1865, the potential for African American achievement that was attributed to formal learning was very limited. Nonetheless, she attained a level of functional literacy. Either this stimulated her appetite for learning and its benefits, or she

saw that a better life was equated to attaining a better education. However, it was the social climate of delta Louisiana and the Mississippi delta that stifled Madam Walker to the point of forcing her to make a dramatic change in her life. This social context included very limited ways to make a living. Except for share cropping, farm related jobs and domestic work, African American women had very few work opportunities and ways to improve their economic status. Educational opportunities for African Americans were covert and clandestine in most parts of the South. By the time Madam Walker was a teenager, Reconstruction had nearly collapsed and a reign of violent terror began to rage throughout the South. Eventually, the violence against African Americans drove Madam Walker to the Midwest when her husband was killed in a race riot. This significant event in her life placed Madam Walker in the position to attain an education for herself and her daughter. When faced with the opportunity to improve the economic status of her life through education, Madam Walker availed herself of it. She attended night school, she sent her daughter to normal school and to Knoxville College for a degree in business. Their pursuits in education were specifically to improve their economic status and to improve their lives. Later, this educational experience and a personal tutor would be the foundation for a barely functionally literate African American woman to defy the odds and establish branches of a vocational trade college throughout North America and parts of South America.

Madam Walker was empowered to attain her manufacturing empire and to make her contributions to society because of her response to her social context and educational success. She was determined to change her world; therefore, she made the sacrifices to

accomplish this. With determination and hard work, Madam Walker prioritized her life. She funded her educational pursuits on the meager wages of a washerwoman.

Through the expansion of her business empire, she expanded and enhanced the ways in which African American women were perceived to be capable of learning and taking care of themselves and their families. The creative diversity of options that she provided her agents also enhanced the way in which African American women benefited from her accomplishments and contributions.

Lelia College stood as a tribute to Madam Walker's belief that narrowly targeted educational programs, such as the vocational trade of hair culturist and product marketing. The minimum literacy level was sixth grade for admission to the college. It soon became known that if an African American wanted more than domestic work, business ownership and the sky is the limit dream, than she needed to become a Madam Walker agent. African Americans were motivated to become associated with Madam Walker if they had the basic educational skills to perform and stay abreast of the trade. Over twenty thousand African American women wanted change in their lives and Lelia College and Madam Walker were the channels that they used to initiate and to sustain this change.

The social context that stimulated Madam Walker's economic empowerment programs also nurtured her philanthropic and political change activism. Even though Madam Walker practiced charity most of her life, her business success and accomplishments enabled her to use money in a powerful way. Working women needed childcare for their children and older persons needed care. Alcohol abuse, domestic violence, low paying jobs, racial tension and violence threatened the moral and economic

development of African American communities. Madam Walker's philanthropic and political activism and her job program were her attempts to temper and buffer the damaging social effects of these moral and economic, social and contextual realities. As important as Madam Walker's leadership was in these areas, more importantly, she modeled to twenty thousand women how money could be used to positively affect social change. The rippling, or trickling down, of Madam Walker's economic success multiplied and affected more African Americans and this had the potential to transform more local communities. These were the early seeds of an alternative way to survive, thrive and live within segregated communities. Madam Walker connected economic empowerment and community transformation.

Question 3 is discussed in the next section. The discussion of Question 3 includes the model of adult education that is drawn from the study of Madam Walker's, contributions, practices, strategies and her response to the social context. Interestingly, the Smith Model of Adult Education incorporates the major themes and insights gleaned from the three research questions that guided the study.

Question 3 Discussed

The previous chapters have presented an interpretive biography of some of the accomplishments and contributions of Madam Walker through the lens of adult education. While this study contributed to adult education's historical body of literature, this was not its sole purpose. The final question that guided the study was to determine if Madam Walker's accomplishments and contributions could contribute and, perhaps, become the guiding thematic concepts for a twenty-first century model of adult education. This model would be designed to facilitate individual change and community

transformation through philanthropic social change and political activism within diverse and economically suppressed communities.

This chapter presents the Smith Model of Adult Education for Individual and Community Transformation that is based upon Madam Walker's ideas, accomplishments, system and practices of educating adult African American women for economic empowerment, community improvement, economic development and social change. The economic, political and social systems of the twentieth century were segregated and restricted. Consequently, Madam Walker's work ideas interactions and successes were limited to African American women. This model attempts to bridge gender, ethnicity, socio-economic class and race in the United States.

A Model for the Twenty-first Century

First, the Smith Model of Adult Education for Individual and Community Transformation is based upon an adult's recognition that his or her economic enhancement could increase if he or she engaged in a specific learning program. During this stage, the adult grows in the realization and acceptance that economic improvement is a process that requires time and dedication. The adult also learns that one's economic enhancement is entwined with political and social systems that may require untangling. When the adult realizes that he or she is not unique or alone in his or her economic situation, then the adult begins to look for similarly intentioned persons to network and unite with for the purpose of economic enhancement and development on a broader level. This flows into the second concept of the model.

Madam Walker's accomplishments indicate that she placed a strong value and emphasis upon identifying, soliciting and including persons who were living similar

realities into the heart of her system of learning and change. This becomes the second concept, which involves joining with persons who experience similar cultural, economic and political circumstances. It is apparent that Madam Walker believed in the unifying power of educational and social goals. Once individual adults formed a community of similar goals, this new community within a community created an identity, character and purpose that benefited individuals and the broader community.

Second, once an individual begins to experience the growth and benefits of learning in adulthood through identified goals, Madam Walker thought that individuals, no matter how poor, had power. This power is apparent in the remainder of her accomplishments and contributions. Philanthropy and political social change activism grow from an enlightened individual who joins with other enlightened adults who are engaged in and towards similar goals and objectives. The individual and other adults begin to transform their community while they are pursuing their adult learning goals. For Madam Walker, this is foundational in that her goal was to impact large numbers of persons rather that create an elite club of successful individuals. It was imperative that families and communities, small and large businesses reaped the benefits of adults who engaged in adult learning activities, who had joined together to facilitate change within their communities as individuals are changed and transformed, including inclusive efforts of others who were in a similar circumstances. It would be rare that personal change could make a difference worth living. She lived her life during one of the most tumultuous periods of United States history from Reconstruction to the Red Summer. She valued life long learning, especially learning for personal improvement and learning for democratic social change. Madam Walker not only valued learning in adulthood, she

managed to become a functionally literate person while she was a washerwoman. Universal education was the dream that Madam Walker had for all African Americans. Madam Walker was committed to learning in adulthood that fostered individual change and community transformation through individual accomplishments.

Madam Walker's Contributions to the Field of Adult Education

The examination of Madam Walker's accomplishments, contributions, and insightful model of adult education has implications for twenty first century adult educators and participants in adult education. It contributes to the body of rich historical adult education literature. This literature sheds light upon the past and it helps to clarify the present. Madam Walker's experiences of adult education strongly demonstrate that adult education, perhaps more than any other field of study, is grounded in the adult's determination to engage more fully within his or her world. Madam Walker never ran from the brutal realities of her life. She sought, through adult education to make meaning and worth of her world and the world of those like herself. Historical research teaches the field of adult education that models of adult education develop and grow within the lived experience of adults of all races, genders, ethnicities, economic levels and educational levels. Madam Walker's limited formal educational training and her remarkable adult educational accomplishments stand alone in the field of adult education.

Today, Madam Walker's vision of adult education is helpful to adult educators, economic development agencies, faith based social change organizations, social change organizations, foundations, government policy makers, and persons or communities who seek economic, social and political change.

Madam Walker's emphasis upon philanthropy forces the adult education participant to become involved, responsible for, and accountable to his or her community. Traditionally, philanthropy was reserved for the wealthy. It was always a top down process. Madam Walker's contribution to the field of adult education demonstrates the power of bottom up philanthropy. Madam Walker knew that power. Self-directed philanthropy is fundamental for adults harnessing the inner power to transform individuals and communities.

Madam Walker's foundations of personal transformation through adult learning, collective economic power, collective political activism, and philanthropy have contemporary implications for social change today. Collective economic power, particularly modeled through the Indian and other Asian women's projects have become very successful in transforming persons and communities. The microeconomic women's projects have experienced success in the United States. However, the Smith Model of adult education has the potential to transform communities in ways similar to the manner in which Madam Walker facilitated the transformation of twenty thousand plus African American women over a period of eleven years.

Self-help, economic change, social change, and philanthropy were equally powerful components of Madam Walker's approach to initiating social change through economic empowerment. Many approaches to adult education and social change tend to emphasize adult learning or political activism, or personal transformation or collective change. Only Madam Walker's approach to adult education is a holistic approach to personal and social change:

(1) Learning in adulthood that facilitates personal growth and transformation;

(2) Learning that facilitates personal economic improvement;

(3) Learning in adulthood that opens and facilitates adult enbeddedness to his or her community;

(4) Identification of issue or challenges that impede individual and community transformation;

(5) Collaboration with others within the community to facilitate social change;

(6) Direction of economic and social resources to facilitate social change, philanthropy and volunteerism; and

(7) Involvement in local and national political activism and risk taking.

The Smith Model of Adult Education Introduced—the Need: Individual and Community Transformation

The economic, social, and political context of many urban and rural communities beg for creative and effective models for individual and community economic improvement. The generalized assumptions with most of these models are that individual economic improvement creates growth and positive change for the individual and thus the community improves. Some models assume that individual growth and improvement trickles down, spreads to other individuals and spills over into the community at large. Community resources trickle down upon small businesses, agencies and organizations. It is assumed that once resources have been planted within struggling urban or rural communities that economic improvement will grow slowly like seedlings in a forest. In other words, the financial status of individuals will improve because of the economic improvement of the community. These types of models approach social change like one flips a coin. Heads, change is pursued through an intense focus on individual economic

improvement, such as higher paying jobs and new business ownership. Tails, change is pursued by an intense concentration on community agencies and key entities, such as banks, nonprofit agencies, and religious organizations. No matter what preference for change is pursued, it is assumed that economic development generates positive economic change, which alters individuals by improving their communities.

Typically, models for economic improvement have focused upon developing business owners and entrepreneurs. Likewise, models for community economic development have focused on generating funds, securing, managing, and distributing resources. Many of these models for individual and or community economic change and development emerge from the fields of sociology, urban and rural development, economics and political science. The Smith Model of Adult Education for Social Change through individual and community transformation emerges from personal insight gained from the field of adult education.

This interpretive biography and examination of Madam Walker's life, accomplishments and contributions to the field of adult education have led me to the development of a model for transformative social change. The model contains concepts of Madam Walker's practice of adult education and it contains many aspects of the contemporary practice of adult education today. It is my belief that Adult education provides persons with unique insights, perspectives and an empowerment of diverse learning options for change and growth that are not fully expressed, developed and appreciated in other fields of study or models for personal economic improvement and community economic development. These models and approaches to change appear to be concerned with economic change, new store fronts, increased consumer sells or the

ability to sell and purchase goods and services, not the transformation of individuals or the transformation of communities.

Madam Walker's practice of adult education demonstrated the concepts of personal transformation, philanthropy as social change and political activism as the vehicle of transformative social change. She focused intensely upon the transformation of individuals and communities through the vehicle of economic development.

Transformation Defined

The Smith Model of Adult Education for Individual and Community Transformation is grounded philosophically in the theoretical work of Jack Mezirow and transformative learning. Critical reflection for individuals and communities becomes the thread that connects and holds together the Smith Model. Mezirow wrote:

> *Reflection on one's own premises can lead to transformative learning.* …Transformative learning involves a particular function of reflection: reassessing the presuppositions on which our beliefs are based and acting on insights derived from the transformed meaning perspective that results from such reassessments. (Mezirow 18)

By far, The Smith Model seeks to nurture, foster, and sustain more than individual development and community development. It works towards individual and community social change through individual and community transformation. For the introduction of The Smith Model, transformation is hereby defined as the creation, acquisition, internalization and directed action of knowledge that facilitates individual and communal action that engenders positive social change. The concept of transformation addresses

relationships among individuals, communities and systems. It is hoped that the continuous practice of adult education and the on-going transformation of adults and communities will counter the negative effects that restrict the adult learning process and effective social change within urban and rural communities. A graphic depiction of the Smith Model can be seen in Figure 9.1.

Madam Walker's contributions to the field of adult education illustrate the incubation of the concept of social transformation. Madam Walker experienced the benefits of adult education, facilitated social change, and experienced transformation. However, her experiences were not the experiences of all of her agents. Individual agents improved their financial status in life and their communities. Yet, social change and transformation did not occur among the masses of her agents and the communities in which they lived. The Smith model seeks to present a comprehensive model of adult education for personal and communal social change and transformation. It reflects the principles of Madam Walker's concepts of personal improvement, community improvement and social change at its core, the individual and the community. The Smith model of adult education and its concept of transformation involve the engagement of incubated learning that metamorphoses into purposeful action designed to change communities and individuals

The Model Discussed

The model is designed to foster the economic development and sustainability of urban and rural communities. Its goals are the identification, modification, neutralization and transformation of persons, agencies, institutions and systems. Moreover, the Smith model goes beyond individual and community economic improvement and development.

Hence, it seeks to bridge the fields of study and ideas concerning individual and community transformation and social change using the vehicle of economic improvement. The Smith Model of Adult Education for Individual and Community Transformation through Social Change embraces the guiding principles that are evident in the adult education practice of Madam Walker and situates it within the social context of the twenty-first century.

The Smith Model

This model of adult education is grounded in the belief that adults and communities are rich, resourceful, capable and empowered to combat the negative forces that restrict the growth of individuals and communities. The nurturing and intertwining of these two relationships are the strongest and weakest link of the model. Adult and community learning and ways of knowing are distinct ways of coming to knowledge for social change and transformation. The two perspectives share and contribute equally to the dynamism, responsibility, relevance, fruition and process of facilitating personal and communal transformation. The individual and the community alternate and share in the leadership, motivation and inspiration of the dance of personal and communal transformation. The two perspectives share four major areas of life-long learning relationships that facilitate and challenge economic empowerment, social change and community transformation. These areas are:

(1) The Individual

Recognition of the need for adult learning, acquisition of knowledge, skills, or abilities designed to initiate change

(2) Philanthropy (Individual Transformation in process)

Deepening of roots and identification with the embededness and questioning of "can one person make a difference?"

Sharing of resources, no matter how limited

Giving of self, volunteerism

(3) Economic Development

Commitment to the individual development of others through community economic development

(4) Social Action and Change-Community Transformation

Risk taking, political involvement

Challenging agencies, organizations, and systems—creating new options

The purpose for this model of adult education is social change through personal economic empowerment and transformative community empowerment. The model is not tilted towards the accomplishments of the individual or the community. This is the fundamental concept that is woven throughout The Smith Model. Commitment and dedication to the community and individuals are the yin and yang, the seesaw, the balance that is crucial to the nurturing of a socially transformed society.

This perspective of adult education for personal and community change and

transformation begins with the dynamic life of the adult within the confrontational social context of his or her life. Paulo Freire said that a person with limited formal educational literacy learns to read his or her world before he or she learns to read text, words, concepts and formulas. A salient event, or a lifetime of events, occurs and the adult is faced with a learning opportunity or challenge. The adult experiences dissonance and believes that change, or betterment, rest with him or her initiating some type of activity. Something or a series of actions nudge the adult into a learning process. One of the options includes personal growth and improvement through some type of adult learning process. This learning process may be self-directed, collaborative or traditional in nature. The individual believes that economic improvement would change the person's life for the better. (Freire 29-30)

Adults must always be engaged in reading and learning their world. At some point during the learning process, the person becomes aware that there may be others living a similar circumstance. He or she realizes that he or she is not the only person affected by the dissonance or challenge that motivated him or her to engage in the learning activity. Up to this point, most adults have focused entirely upon their own economic improvement and they viewed it as the end or sole goal. The adult saw economic enhancement and improvement as the end goal or purpose of the learning activity. However, time and engagement with others within the community created an affection and a sense of communal relational dependency and responsibility. The adult begins to respond to the world that he ort she sees in whatever ways that he or she can respond. This may manifest in small giving or acts of charity or in volunteerism. This moves the individual to see the community as a logical beneficiary of his or her increased resources.

As one's resources grow, the individual begins to mentor and nurture another or others in the skills of economic empowerment.

The examination of Madam Walker's accomplishments, contributions and insightful use of adult education has implications for twenty first century adult educators and participants in adult education. It contributes to the body of rich historical adult education literature. This literature sheds light upon the past and it helps to clarify the present. Madam Walker's model and experiences of adult education strongly demonstrate that adult education, perhaps more than any other filed of study, is grounded in the adult's determination to engage more fully within his or her world. Madam Walker never ran from the brutal realities of her life. She sought, through adult education to make meaning and worth of her world and the world of those like herself. Historical research teaches the field of adult education that models of adult education develop and grow within the lived experience of adults of all races, genders, ethnicities, economic levels and educational levels. Madam Walker's limited formal educational training and her remarkable adult educational accomplishments stand alone in the field of adult education.

Future Research on Madam Walker's Approach to Adult Education

Madam Walker's accomplishments and contributions to adult education are far from being depleted with this extensive study. Her approach to adult education has tremendous implications for twenty-first century participants in adult education. Her model of adult education cries out to be presented to persons of low income and low educational levels. Perhaps, some of these adults may want to transform their lives and communities in similar ways as did Madam Walker. Foundations, adult education agencies, faith-based social change organizations, other social change organizations, and

the government may desire to partner with communities to test how adult education transforms individuals and communities.

Conclusions

An historical dissertation, *Madam C.J. Walker (1867-1919), African American Entrepreneur, Philanthropist, Social Change Activist and Education of African American Women,* examined the life and contributions of one remarkable woman in the field of adult education. Told within the rich social context of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the study allowed Madam Walker's voice and that of some of her contemporaries to speak to a new audience and a new generation. From a social landscape ablaze with oppression and inhumanity to the crowded and stagnate ghettoes of St. Louis, to the ice, snow and cold of Denver and Pittsburgh, to the openness of opportunities of Indianapolis and New York, Madam Walker created a life well worth living. She faced the tragedies of her life with resolve and was determined to make a way even when there appeared to be no way for a better future for herself and her daughter. Madam Walker is outstanding because her desire for change not only affected her life but also the lives of more than twenty-thousand African American women who worked as agents for her, and the people impacted by the many dozens of social organizations and agencies that she assisted financially.

The findings in this interpretive biography contribute to the body of adult education historical research. Its contributions and insights shed light upon African American women of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and their experiences of learning in adulthood for individual and work productivity. These women believed in and worked for social change through small groups of like-minded

organizations and actions across the country. Believing that universal education was a fundamental right, they embraced vocational education as the fast track to economic development. Learning in adulthood created change and individual change facilitated community change. African American women learning the vocational trade of cosmetology was the catalyst that transformed communities in which Madam Walker had a strong presence. Through their strong philanthropic support of local community organizations, they helped to extend humanitarian care and educational opportunities. Learning in adulthood served as a conduit for the extension of the democratic promise to African Americans by their commitment and involvement in social change and organized political activism.

However, this research was intended to be more than an interpretive biography. The Smith Model of Adult Education is grounded in the strategies and comprehensiveness of Madam Walker's personal, community, social and political approaches to becoming successful in her lifetime. It seeks to bridge the historical examination of Madam Walker's accomplishments and contributions to the field of adult education to contemporary life within economically challenged communities in the United States.

Poverty, along with its negative consequences, continues to grow within the United States. The Smith Model seeks to empower adults to design and implement change within communities that address the systemic and root causes of poverty, limited educational skills among adults, and lack of grassroots vision and leadership of change within poor urban and rural communities.

Future research will continue to develop and implement the model, and it is my

belief that Madam Walker's accomplishments and contributions can be re-invented within the individual, communal and political landscapes of our times.

Many African American women, some well known, some not, have lived lives of meaning and worth. Madam Walker is one whose life is worthy of study. The Smith Model of Adult Education intends to help keep the contributions and accomplishments of Madam Walker before the hearts and minds of poor persons and adult-education practitioners. History is the telling of a story that has meaning not only for examining the past but also for living the present with the intent of creating a new and better future. This study has attempted to examine the historical Madam Walker and her social context with the possibility of helping thousands of poor persons live the dream of Madam Walker. In the twenty-first century, men and women may not drive new luxury cars and build mansions that rival Madam Walker's palatial home. But they might. The intent of the Smith Model is to empower adults to transform their perspectives and lives, form learning communities for economic improvement, engage in grassroots community philanthropy and create new systems of political justice. This twenty-first century attempt to make Madam Walker known to more persons and to share some of her inspirational possibilities removes her from the archives and makes her a contemporary inspiration for men and women seeking to do what she did: Make a better life for herself and her descendents.

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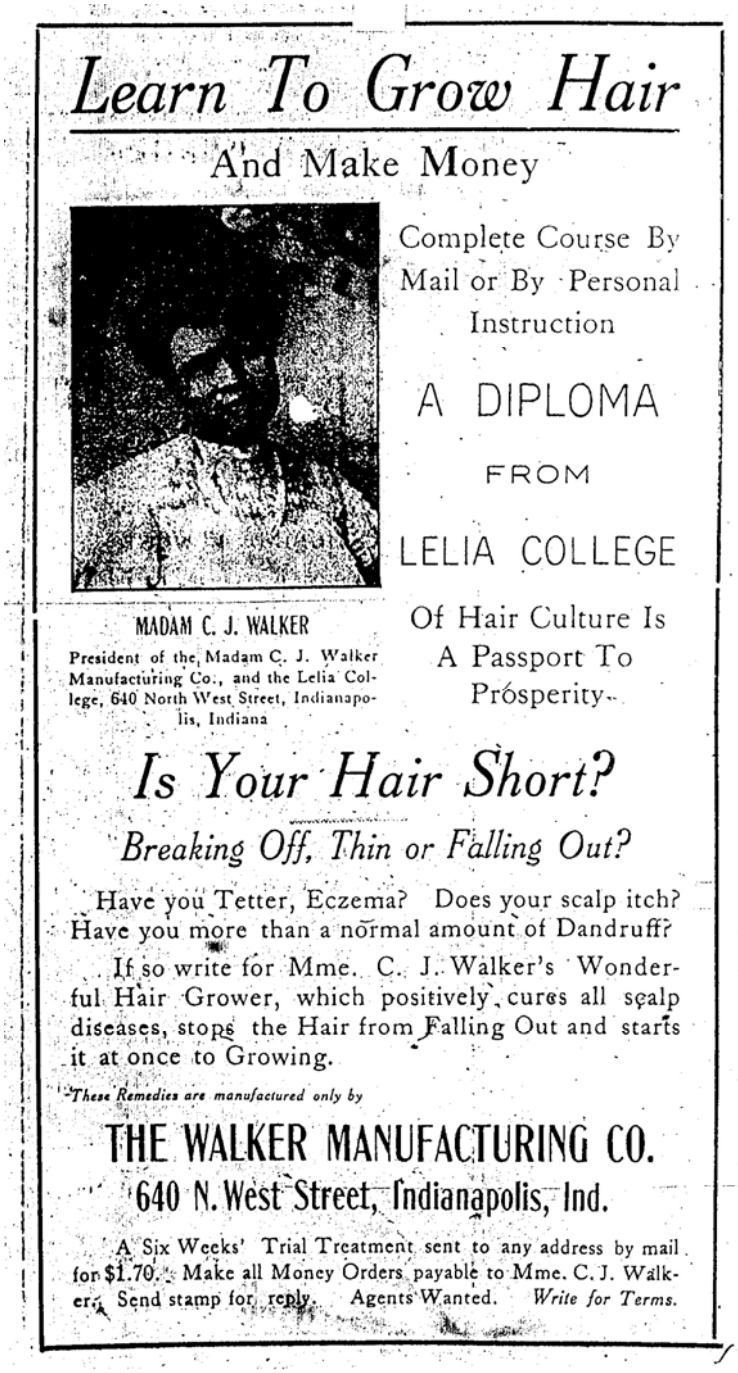
APPENDIX

Figure 1.1
Madam C.J. Walker

Figure 4.1
A’Lelia Walker Robinson

Figure 4.2
Newspaper ad offering Madam Walker's seal of guarantee



Learn To Grow Hair

And Make Money

Complete Course By Mail or By Personal Instruction

A DIPLOMA

FROM

LELIA COLLEGE

Of Hair Culture Is A Passport To Prosperity.

MADAM C. J. WALKER

President of the Madam C. J. Walker Manufacturing Co., and the Lelia College, 640 North West Street, Indianapolis, Indiana

Is Your Hair Short?

Breaking Off, Thin or Falling Out?

Have you Tetter, Eczema? Does your scalp itch? Have you more than a normal amount of Dandruff?

If so write for Mme. C. J. Walker's Wonderful Hair Grower, which positively cures all scalp diseases, stops the Hair from Falling Out and starts it at once to Growing.

These Remedies are manufactured only by

THE WALKER MANUFACTURING CO.

640 N. West Street, Indianapolis, Ind.

A Six Weeks' Trial Treatment sent to any address by mail for $1.70. Make all Money Orders payable to Mme. C. J. Walker. Send stamp for reply. Agents Wanted. *Write for Terms.*

Figure 4.3
African American newspaper ad

Figure 4.4
Madam Walker lectures to a beauty class

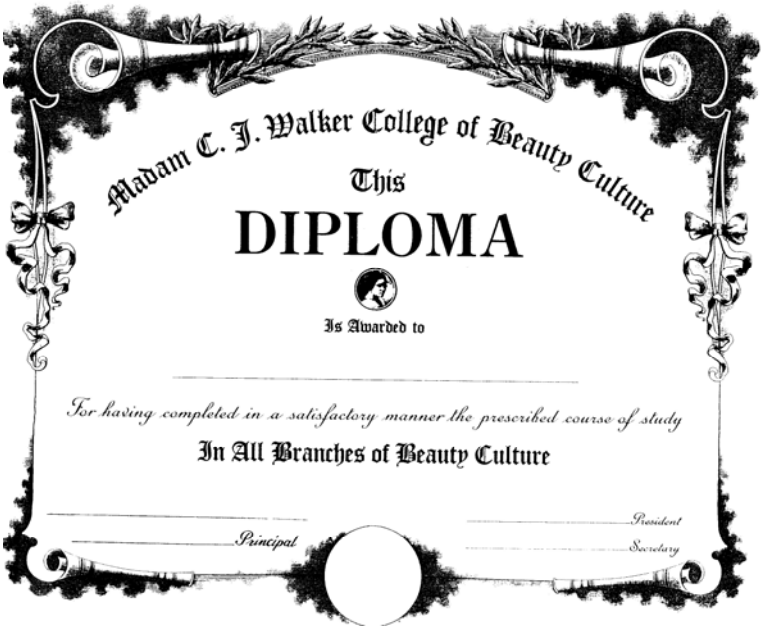
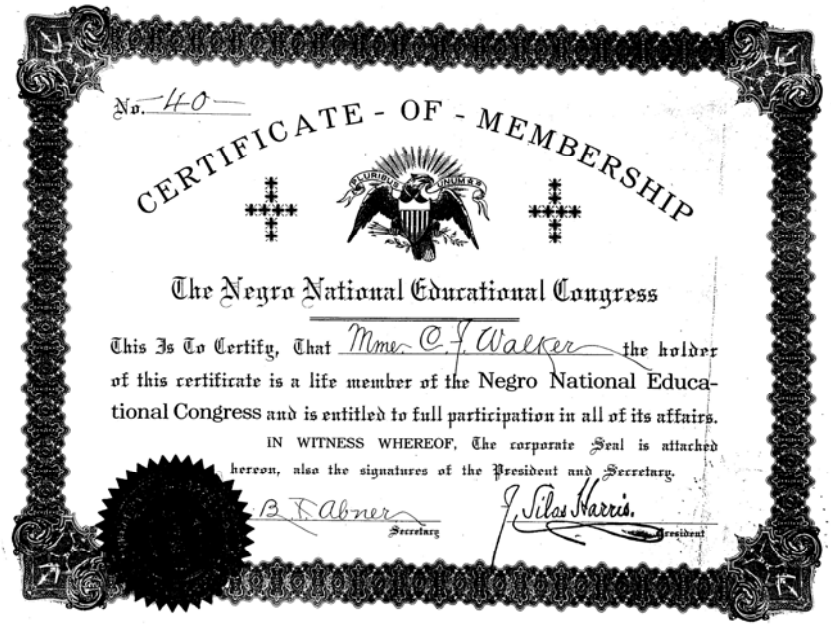


Figure 4.5
Beauty college diploma

Figure 5.1
Freeman Briley Ransom

Figure 5.2
Madam Walker's Indianapolis home



No. 40

CERTIFICATE - OF - MEMBERSHIP

The Negro National Educational Congress

This Is To Certify, That Mme. C. J. Walker the holder of this certificate is a life member of the Negro National Educational Congress and is entitled to full participation in all of its affairs.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, The corporate Seal is attached hereon, also the signatures of the President and Secretary.

B. F. Abner Secretary

J. Silas Harris. President

Figure 5.3
Negro National Educational Congress membership certificate

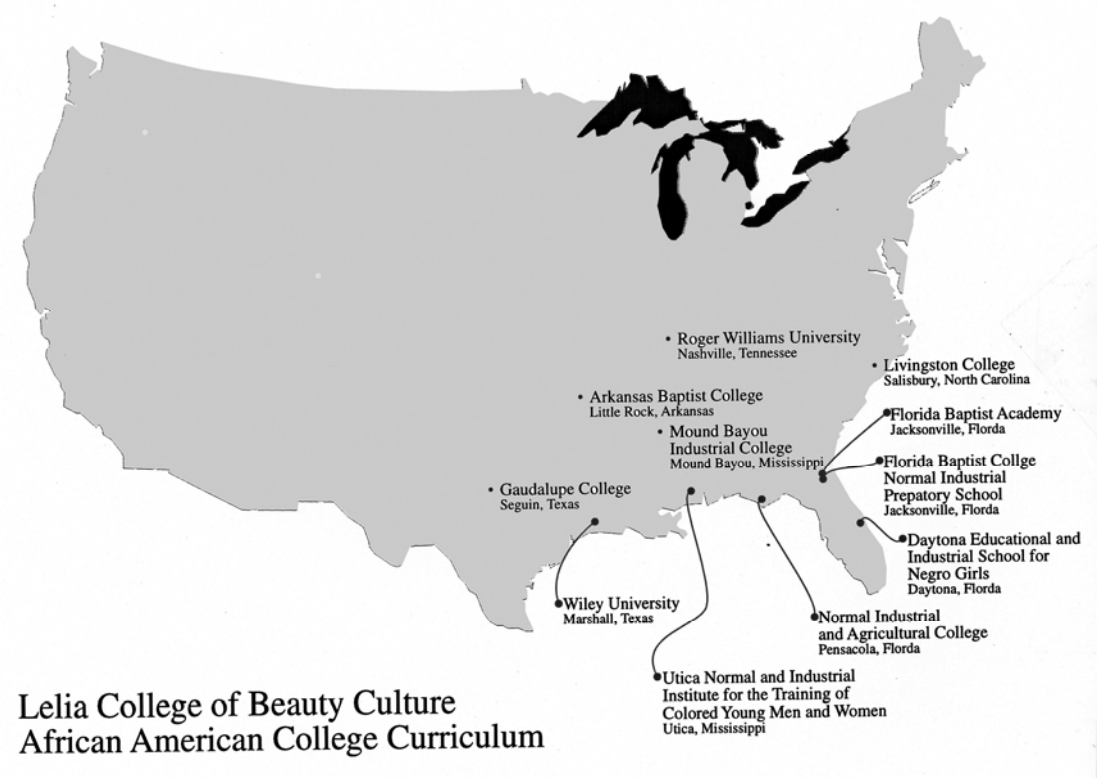


Figure 5.4
Location of Madam Walker's programs in other colleges

TRUSTEES
JAMES N. GAMBLE, CINCINNATI, OHIO, PRES.
HARRISON RHODES, NEW YORK, N. Y., VICE-PRES.
LAURENCE THOMPSON, DAYTONA, FLA., SEC'Y-TREAS
C. M. WILDER, CINCINNATI, OHIO
GEORGE S. DOANE, PASADENA, CAL.

TRUSTEES
REV. ROBERT MCKAY, DAYTONA, FLA.
SMITH G. YOUNG, LANSING, MICH.
EMMETT J. SCOTT, TUSKEGEE, ALA.
MARY MCLEOD BETHUNE, DAYTONA, FLA.

The Daytona Educational and Industrial Training School for Negro Girls
INCORPORATED
MARY McLEOD BETHUNE, PRINCIPAL

Daytona, Florida, April 5th, 1917

Mme. C. J. Walker,
640 North West Street,
Indianapolis, Ind.

My dear Madam Walker:

Your interesting letter of March 27th is before me and has interested me very much. For the past four years my girls and myself have been using your wonderful Hair grower. We have proven it to be very beneficial indeed and would be very glad to place it in our school as a course of study.

We thank you very much for you offer to furnish the room for the work and shall be very glad to try to arrange for one of our workers to take your course in your New York College. Will you please advise me as to the length of time it will take to complete this course? We shall have to study this very carefully because of the expense of the young woman accomplish this. We should be very glad if you had something connected with your institution that she could do to help her while taking this work with her board and lodging

The young woman whom we shall send is very much adapted to hair dressing, manicuring, etc., but is totally dependent as far as money is concerned. She is a girl whom we have had in our school for several years, the school being her only home, therefore anything you can do to help her will be graciously appreciated.

We have been wishing very much that you would honor our Institution with a visit, we believe you would become more tangibly interested if you would come and see the work we are doing. Two years ago you were generous enough to contribute $100 to our work. We were hoping that you would make this an annual contribution. The high cost of living has made this a very anxious year for us. May we hear from you now?

Hoping you continued prosperity, I am

Very gratefully yours,

Mary McLeod Bethune

MMB/RR

Figure 5.5
Letter to Madam Walker from Mary McLeod Bethune

Figure 6.1
Sales agents at Madam Walker's home in Irvington, New York

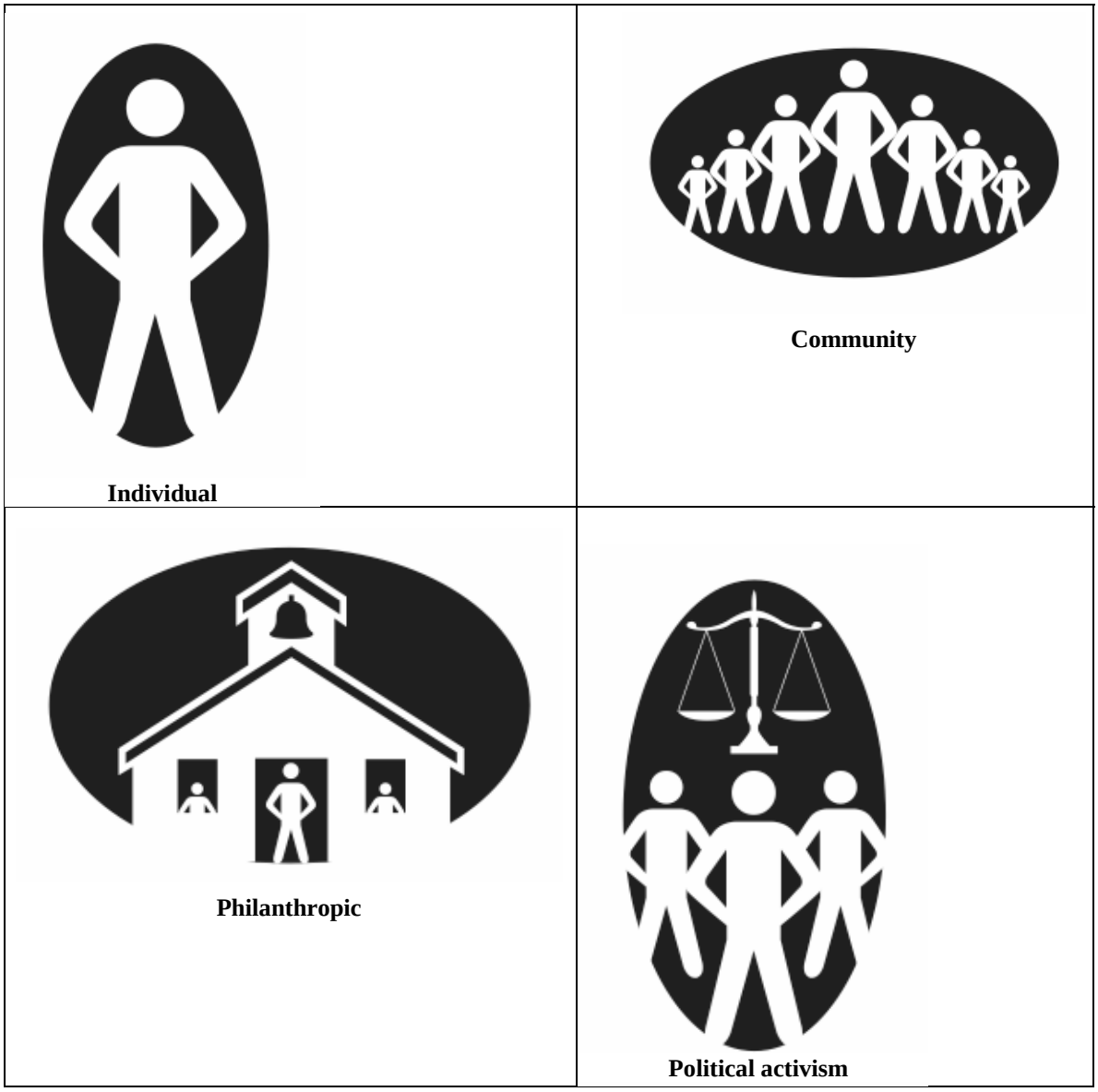


Figure 9.1
The Smith Model of Adult Education

Vita

Ruth Queen Smith was born on July 12, 1952, in Nashville, Tennessee. She had two life-changing events in her early life: the death of her brother, Yancy, in the Vietnam War and a high school mission trip to Haiti. Ruth attended St. Vincent de Paul grade school and Cathedral High School. She received a scholarship and attended Syracuse University where she earned a B.A. degree in photojournalism and political science. Upon graduation, Ruth became the second female and the first African American to earn a degree in photojournalism from the distinguished S.I. Newhouse School of Communications. When she returned to Nashville and began working as a television news photographer at WSMV-Channel 4, she became the first female television news photographer in the South. The resignation of Governor Ray Blanton and the recapture of James Earl Ray were two of her most memorable stories. After six years of accomplishments, Ruth embarked on a career of small-business ownership. This stressful experience led to her work as the Assistant Director of the Small Business Development Center, housed at Tennessee State University. There she assisted small-business owners and persons seeking to start their own businesses with business, marketing and advertising plans.

However, stress takes its toll on the body. While engaged in her own business, Ruth developed health issues--Multiple Sclerosis (MS), which began the most challenging part of her life's journey. Her illness affected her vision; consequently, she gradually lost her sight. In order to prepare for a self-sufficient life, she decided to enter a Master's Degree in Technology and Adult Education at the University of Tennessee.

Upon completion, Ruth entered the doctorate program. The challenges of blindness were made manageable with the advance of sophisticated software, Job Access Work Systems, or JAWS. Health issues continued. Health issues continued. Two fractured and ruptured disks and a brain tumor had to be attended to within an eighteen-month period during which Ruth also lost her parents.

Throughout life, faith in God, people and self always empowered Ruth to continue her goals and accomplish her potential. This dissertation is a metaphor of determination, commitment, dedication and grace.